

# THE INVESTIGATORS in

## THE MYSTERY OF THE DRAGON'S EYE





in

**THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
DRAGON'S EYE**

A blood-curdling cry echoes through the forest. When The Three Investigators set out on a search, they find a little girl, trembling and pointing to the sky. “It was a dragon! A dragon attacked me!” she says. A short time later, a strange animal is indeed hovering high up in the clouds. The little girl also claims to see mythical creatures in the forest. When taking a close look at this case during their investigations, Jupiter, Pete and Bob discover that they can’t always trust their own eyes...

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Dragon's Eye

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## 1. Attack from the Air

It was a warm, sunny day. Jupiter Jones marched through the shady forest with a shouldered backpack and walking stick in his hand. A small stream flowed beside him. He listened to the splashing of the water and answered the interviewer's questions in a good mood.

"I hear you even have a real detective agency, and a so-called headquarters."

"That's right. An extremely modern high-tech office with dignified interior and exterior architecture that sets new standards. In addition, our company is located in an area of Rocky Beach with an exciting infrastructure that is perfectly tailored to our needs."

The interviewer cleared his throat. "Really? I heard that it was actually an ancient, beat-up trailer in your uncle's junkyard."

"That was what I told you," Jupiter replied, unmoved. "By the way, it is a salvage yard not a junkyard."

The interviewer nodded knowingly. "Why do you have three question marks as your corporate symbol?"

"It's very simple. The question mark is a symbol for everything unknown—for questions that demand an answer, for puzzles that want to be solved, for secrets and mysteries. Since we as detectives are tempted to solve these mysteries, the question mark seemed to me to be a very appropriate corporate symbol."

"And you actually solved a few cases in your younger years?"

"A lot," Jupiter boasted. "And they get more mysterious than ever."

"If you were to characterize yourself and your colleagues, especially in relation to your work, what would that look like? Do each of you have special skills and areas of responsibility?"

"I'm grateful that you asked that. We always work as a team. That's why a lot of people think that each of us has equal status within the trio. That's not the case, of course. In fact, it's me who does most of the work. I am the only one whose intellect was up to the many difficult tasks we have faced in the past. My colleagues, well, you know... Bob Andrews is a nice guy and not unintelligent at all, but he's still best suited for sidekick work—you know, do the time-consuming research, all the office work, run errands and so forth. And as for Pete Crenshaw, well, now that I think about it, I'm not so sure why he's in our team at all."

"Oh, really?" The interviewer made no effort to hide his displeasure.

"Yes," Jupe continued. "Most of the time he's a burden to us. He constantly doubts everything we do. He is a permanent brake that hinders my intellectual work. Come to think of it, he is only good at handling dangerous situations that require physical effort."

"What? Climb to the ninth floor from the outside of a building, for example?"

"For example..."

"Or dive fifty metres down the ocean without oxygen to recover a treasure?"

"Something like that..."

"Or distract wild animals away so you can get to safety?"

"Right, right—that kind of thing. He's like, what you could say, the cannon fodder in our team."

His conversation partner whirled around the broken branch that had served as a microphone, scooped some muddy water from the stream and splashed Jupiter with it. “You idiot!”

Jupiter laughingly took himself to safety. “Why am I an idiot? You started this interview. Can I help it if you can’t handle the truth?”

“Just you wait, Jupiter Jones,” Pete said as he bent down to the stream and used his hands to scoop up more muddy water. “Now I’ll show you what else the cannon fodder is capable of!”

With full force, he splashed Jupiter wet. He ran away, but Pete didn’t give in so easily. He reached even deeper into the creek, scooped out a handful of mud and threw it at the fleeing First Investigator.

Jupiter screamed in feigned panic, caught up with Bob, who had walked a bit ahead of them, and hid behind him. “Help me, Bob, the cannon fodder wants revenge!”

“The what?”

“Don’t you dare protect him, Bob!” cried Pete from behind, armed with another lump of mud. “He has wounded me deep in my honour! And you too, by the way!”

“I was just...” Jupiter began, using Bob as a shield, “telling the truth!”

“Now it’s up to you! Bob! Duck down!” Pete cried and threw the mud ball. Bob did not duck.

Instead, he turned to the Second Investigator. “Why don’t you stop these silly—”

Splash!

“Oh! Oh! That... that really wasn’t...” Pete’s apology was drowned in Jupiter’s whinnying laughter and Bob’s angry roar. “Well... Wait!”

Surprisingly fast, Bob sprinted off, dug his hands deep into the mud and threw them at Pete.

Splash!

“Bulls-eye!” Jupiter yelled and could hardly contain himself with laughter as the mud ran through Pete’s hair. “Hey, Pete, you should change your hairdresser!”

Bob and Pete nodded meaningfully to each other.

“Oh no,” Jupiter said and backed off.

“Oh, yes!” Pete said.

“Hey, I’m absolutely innocent! Just because you’re no match for me intellectually, doesn’t mean you have to—”

Splash!

Within a few moments, a wild mud battle broke out, in which everyone was given a good thrashing. After two minutes, all three looked as if they had fought their way through the Amazon delta for three weeks.

“Stop!” cried Jupiter wheezing. “I take it all back and admit defeat!”

“Me too!” said Bob. “Even though I didn’t do anything.”

“All right,” said Pete, who was the only one not out of breath. He looked at his friends—Jupiter had a huge clump of mud stuck in his hair, while Bob’s eyes glowed eerily white from a black-brown mask. “You look like you’ve had a long bath in... well, let’s not go there. Definitely real bad.”

Five minutes later, they were sitting in a sunny meadow off the forest path, trying to clean their faces with tufts of grass.

“You’re really stupid, Pete,” Jupiter said. “We look like pigs.”

“A mud mask like this is good for the skin,” Pete countered. “And hair, too, I suppose.”

“Sure... and for the T-shirt,” Juve added.



“Give it up, fellas,” Bob suggested. “The only thing that’ll help is a shower at home. Let’s just hope we don’t run into anyone at our picnic, or we’ll get a complaint for causing public nuisance.”

“I see only one public nuisance here,” Pete said and looked at Jupiter.

But the First Investigator could not be provoked any more. His attention was focused on the bulging backpacks.

“Picnic! I almost forgot the reason for our trip here!” Jupiter exclaimed.

“You? No!” Bob burst out. “What do we start with? Andrews’s famous potato salad, Mr Crenshaw’s meatballs or Aunt Mathilda’s cherry pie?”

“With nothing,” Pete said. “We were supposed to go for a little walk, weren’t we?”

“Impossible,” Jupiter said decidedly. “This mud-wrestling has completely invalidated me. Without strengthening, I can’t move one metre further.”

Soon they had unpacked all their backpacks and made their way across the sea of food and drink. Secretly, no one believed that they would continue to wander around.

“Splendid,” Pete sighed and let the last crumbs of coconut macaroons roll into his mouth. “At last, do nothing and just hold your stomach out in the sun!”

He let himself fall back into the soft grass and closed his eyes. “Who would have thought that I would experience this again—a normal summer day after school, a picnic in the country, no excitement, no stress, no new case to get on my nerves, no one chasing us, no one we have to chase, no lost treasures, no ghostly apparitions, no ambush attacks, no ominous clients, no sinister schemes, no intrigues, plots and conspiracies, nothing to keep you awake all night, no creepy houses with dark cellars and even darker secrets... simply peace and quiet and sun and cherry pie. Wonderful!”

“Aiieeee!”

Suddenly, a scream echoed through the forest and tore Pete from his dreams. He startled. “What was that?”

“Sounds like a child screaming!” Bob exclaimed.

“Aiieeee!” The scream was a blood-curdling shrill, and then it was followed by a high-pitched croak and shriek: “Keeaah!”

All three of them jumped up.

“It came from there!” Bob cried and ran towards the edge of the field, which was bordered by thick bushes. He paced through the undergrowth and ran through a small patch of forest leading to a clearing.

There stood a girl about six years old. She held her hands in front of her face and stared whimpering at the sky.

Bob followed her gaze and just noticed a large shadow fluttering into the trees. The girl noticed The Three Investigators, flinched and took a step back.

“Don’t worry, we’re here to help you,” Bob said. “Are you hurt?”

She nodded silently. Her eyes, wide with fear, looked from one to the other.

Now Jupiter stepped forward. “Let me see,” he asked and carefully took her hands off her face. Jupiter flinched. She had some bleeding scratches on her forehead as if she had had a fight with a cat. Her arms were also scratched. In some places, blood ran down her skin.

“It’s not that bad,” Jupiter said to calm her down, although it actually looked pretty bad. “How... how did this happen? Was that a cat?”

She looked at Jupiter in a panic. She was trembling all over and her voice was barely audible when she said: “It... it was a dragon! A dragon attacked me!”

## 2. Dragons and Trolls

“What?” Jupiter asked. “A... a dragon?”

“It... it went... it went straight into the trees! It hurts so much!” Tears ran down her face and she still stared at The Three Investigators as if they were not from this world. “Are... are you trolls?”

Jupiter thought he had misheard. “Pardon? Trolls?”

“Did you send the dragon? Or did you chase him away?”

The Three Investigators looked at each other in bewilderment.

“She’s completely confused,” Pete remarked. “Listen, little girl, what’s your name?”

“Emily,” sobbed the girl.

“So, Emily. You’re bleeding a little,” Pete said. “It’s nothing serious, but we don’t want the scratches to get infected. A short distance through the woods towards the road is a house. We can take care of you there. What do you say we go there together?”

Emily nodded and wiped tears from her face. “If you are not trolls, then what are you?”

Bob understood what she was talking about. “Just normal people. It’s just mud on our faces, nothing more.”

She seemed relieved, although she was still sobbing. “But you saw the dragon too, didn’t you?”

Pete frowned. “To be honest...”

“I saw something,” Bob said. “As I ran across the field, it just disappeared into the trees. I couldn’t see what it was.”

“A dragon! I told you so!” Emily burst out.

“Oh, yes,” Bob said. “Fine. Uh...”

“Come on, Emily, we’d better hurry,” Pete said and took a few steps forward. And before he knew it, Emily was already at his side and reached for his hand.

As they set off, Bob noticed something in the grass—a tattered bunch of yellow meadow flowers. Bob picked it up and showed it to Emily. “Is this yours?”

“Yes,” Emily said. She took the flowers and held them like a precious treasure. Then she looked attentively at the scratches on her arm. The bleeding had stopped and Emily seemed to consider whether it was worth shedding tears for.

“Now tell us again from the beginning,” Pete asked when he had the feeling that Emily was slowly calming down. “What exactly happened?”

“I don’t know exactly. I was walking around to pick these magic flowers here for the fairy queen. Suddenly, a dragon came and attacked me. He had his claws on my arm and on my face. He got caught in my hair and flapped his wings wildly.”

“How big was the... dragon?”

“About like that,” said Emily, holding her hands about thirty centimetres apart. “With wings.”

“So a miniature dragon,” Jupiter remarked mockingly.

“You probably don’t believe me,” Emily replied defiantly and wiped the last tear from her cheek. “But it is true... I can see things other people can’t—like dragons. You can’t, can you?”

“Uh, no,” Pete confessed.

“Listen, Emily,” Bob said carefully. “Maybe it was something else... something that only looked like a dragon—a large bird, perhaps.”

“That’s nonsense, Bob,” Pete said. “Birds don’t attack people—except in Hitchcock movies.”

“It was a dragon,” Emily insisted. “It even had scales. Do birds have scales? ... No.” She let go of Pete’s hand and walked ahead with her head held high.

Soon the house came into view. It was a small, plain wooden house at the edge of the forest. The Three Investigators and Emily made their way through the undergrowth to the verandah. There a blond man sat in a rocking chair reading. Next to him on a small table was piled a dozen thick books. When he noticed The Three Investigators and Emily, he took off his glasses, stood up and stepped against the wooden railing.

“Dr Wakefield!” Emily cried, parted with The Three Investigators and ran up the three steps to the verandah.

“Hello, Emily! What happened to you?” He looked up and scrutinized The Three Investigators. “Good afternoon.”

“Good day, sir,” Jupiter greeted the man as he approached the verandah. “You know each other?”

“Yes. I’m Emily’s eye doctor,” Dr Wakefield said. “What happened here?”

“Sorry to disturb you, but Emily is injured and needs medical attention. Do you happen to have some iodine and bandages in the house?”

“As it happens, yes. And I also happen to have fresh water and soap. Unless, of course, this is a new fashion that I have somehow missed.”

Jupiter needed a second to understand what the man was saying.

“But first, Emily, what happened to you?” Dr Wakefield asked again.

“A dragon attacked me!” Emily cried. “And then these three trolls came. I mean, they’re not really trolls at all, but they look like trolls, right?”

“Indeed they do,” Dr Wakefield replied with a mocking smile. “But now let’s see your scratches. How did that happen? Did you fall into some bushes?”

“No,” Emily replied impatiently. “Listen to me! It was a dragon!”

“Okay, Emily, come inside so I can take a look.” Dr Wakefield put his arm around Emily’s shoulder and led her into the house. Shortly after, he returned, put a bucket of water on the verandah and placed three towels next to it. “I’ll take a look at Emily now.” With that he disappeared into the interior of the house.

“Oh man, how embarrassing,” Pete moaned and tried to wash the mud off his face. “We look like bums. The man must think we live by the swamp or something.”

Within a short time, the towels were dirty and the water in the bucket was dark brown.

Bob looked closely at his friends and pulled a face. “You’re not much better looking than I am.”

“So you think you’re clean now?” Pete mocked.

Just then, Dr Wakefield stepped out onto the verandah. Emily happily hopped up and down as if nothing had happened. Her injuries had been cleaned and the worst of the scratches had been treated and plastered up. She seemed to be in perfect health. In one hand, she held the bouquet of flowers, in the other, a lollipop. “At least now I can see that you are not trolls.”

The man shook hands with The Three Investigators one by one. “Tiberius Wakefield.”

“I am Jupiter Jones,” said the First Investigator. “And these are my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews.”

“How do you do? It was very nice of you to bring Emily to me. She told me what happened. Did you see that... dragon?”

“I saw something,” Bob replied. “But only for a moment—a shadow. It went into the trees.”

“Then it was sure to be a bird.”

Bob hesitated. “I know it sounds strange, but I’m not sure. I only saw it for a split-second. Of course, normally I would agree with you, but...”

“But if Emily says it was a dragon,” Dr Wakefield continued, “then maybe it really was one, do you think so?”

“It was!” Emily affirmed.

“Are you serious?” Jupiter asked, irritated.

Tiberius Wakefield smiled mysteriously. “Are you saying Emily was lying?”

The First Investigator didn’t know how to answer that.

“Either way, whether it is a dragon or a bird, I thank you for your helpfulness. I will drive Emily home in my car right away. Goodbye.”

“Excuse me, sir,” Jupe said quickly, “but we can take her home after all. We have delayed you long enough—provided Emily doesn’t mind.”

“No!” cried Emily enthusiastically.

“All right. But please take the direct route! If anything happens—”

“We will take good care of Emily,” assured Jupiter.

“And Emily,” Dr Wakefield added, turned to the girl and winked at her, “remember what we discussed!”

“Sure, Dr Wakefield!”

They said goodbye and left the verandah.

“Okay, Emily, where do we have to go?” Pete asked.

“This way!” She grabbed Pete’s hand and went ahead.

The woods they crossed were idyllically quiet. The birds were singing in the sun and a light breeze rustled the tree tops. The Three Investigators had chosen an area on the eastern outskirts of Rocky Beach for their summer hike.

During the twenty minutes they walked through the forest, Emily talked incessantly to The Three Investigators. She told them about the most wondrous creatures she had ever encountered here in the forest—elves, unicorns and gnomes.

Then they reached a clearing where there were several colourfully painted rocks. Nearby, there was a sign that identified the rocks as a work of art by an artist from Rocky Beach.

“This is my favourite place,” Emily cried enthusiastically, hopping around the rocks. “This eye once belonged to a dragon. He was very naughty, so a wizard turned him into stone. See how huge the eye is? The dragon that attacked me was probably just a baby.”

The Three Investigators had no idea what Emily was talking about. They only saw colourful rocks and shook their heads.

“Have you ever seen a dragon before?” Emily asked.

“No,” Pete replied. “At least not a real one.”

“And a unicorn?”

“Not really.”

“And a griffin?”

“No.”

“Do you know what a griffin is?” Emily continued. “It has a body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. The fairy queen says that there are a few of them here in the woods, but I haven’t seen any.”

It was like this all the way home. But eventually they reached the first houses of the small Californian coastal town.

“That’s where I live,” Emily said and pointed to the first house in a typical American suburban settlement. A young woman worked in the garden. She looked up, recognized Emily, immediately dropped the hedge trimmer and ran towards her.

“Hello, Mum!” Emily called out.

“Emily! For goodness’ sake, what happened?” Emily’s mum cried. She knelt down and looked at the plasters and scratches on Emily’s forehead and arms in horror. Over her shoulder, she looked suspiciously at The Three Investigators.

“It’s not that bad, Mum, it doesn’t hurt anymore. Dr Wakefield fixed me up, and gave me a lollipop... And Jupiter, Pete and Bob brought me home. Don’t worry, they’re not trolls, even if they look like trolls.”

Emily’s mother looked irritated from Emily to The Three Investigators and back again.

Jupiter laughed. “Forgive our appearance. We can tell you the whole story, Mrs...”

“Silverstone,” said the dark-haired woman in a harsh tone. Her eyes darkened. “What have you done to my daughter?”

“Excuse me?” Jupiter asked in amazement. “Nothing at all! We—”

“I’m warning you!” Mrs Silverstone burst out. “First those terrible stories about trolls and witches and all that nonsense, and now you’re attacking her!”

She took Emily in her arms and stood up abruptly. “I’m calling the police right now!”

### 3. The Search for Clues

“But Mum!” protested Emily. “Those three boys haven’t done anything wrong!”

“Please, Mrs Silverstone,” Jupiter said calmly. “There must be some misunderstanding. We were just bringing your daughter home.”

Mrs Silverstone, who had already turned around, stopped and examined The Three Investigators from top to bottom.

Jupiter tried smiling. “And we don’t usually look like we just took a mud bath.”

“Mum, they saved me from the dragon!” Emily continued.

Then Mrs Silverstone turned to The Three Investigators and said: “May I hear your version of what happened?”

“Your daughter had a little accident.” Jupiter told her the whole story in short sentences.

After Emily confirmed everything, Mrs Silverstone’s face relaxed. “I’m sorry. I just thought... Well, I thought you were someone else. I’m always afraid for Emily when she goes into the woods alone. You have to be really careful these days. Thank you guys so much for helping Emily and bringing her home. Would you like something to drink?”

“Sure,” Jupe replied.

Mrs Silverstone led them through the garden to the back, where under a parasol were a few chairs and a table with iced tea. The Three Investigators took their seats. Emily leapt around them. “Mum, can I get an ice cream?”

“So, you want ice cream. First you break your promise, then you want ice cream,” her mother said. The disappointment was clearly written on Emily’s face. “How many times have I told you not to go so far into the forest alone? We agreed that you can only go as far as the hiking trail!”

“But I had to bring the magic flowers to the fairy queen!” She glanced at the yellow bouquet and gasped in horror. “Oh, no! Now I have forgotten about the fairy queen completely! May I go back there again?”

“Absolutely not,” Mrs Silverstone said sternly. “You’ve done enough today, young lady! You should be thanking these three boys for helping you!”

Emily looked down in shame. “Thank you.”

“So much helpfulness is really rare these days,” Mrs Silverstone said. “And you didn’t even let Dr Wakefield take Emily home...”

Jupiter cleared his throat. “To be honest, we had another motive for doing this, Mrs Silverstone.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, we’re a little interested in the dragon story,” Jupiter said.

“In what way?”

“An unknown creature attacked Emily and injured her. This is a matter we would like to investigate further. It may have been an accident with a stray bird...”

“It wasn’t a bird,” Emily insisted. “It was a dragon!”

“Or with a stray dragon,” Jupiter added, wringing a smile in Emily’s direction.

“Possibly... but it could be something else. In any case, it is a mystery. And we have a knack for solving mysteries of this kind. May I give you our card?”

Jupiter Jones took a slightly stained and creased business card from his trouser pocket and handed it to Mrs Silverstone. It said:



Mrs Silverstone turned the card between her fingers and smiled uncertainly. "I don't understand."

"We would like to investigate this case," replied the First Investigator. "We specialize, so to speak, in mysterious incidents of this kind."

"I didn't realize you could specialize in dragon attacks," Mrs Silverstone quipped.

"What are you guys going to do?" Emily asked curiously.

"We will try to find this dragon," Pete explained and looked at Jupiter questioningly. "Isn't that right, Jupe? The dragon or whatever it was."

"Oh, yes!" Emily cried and jumped excitedly on the spot. "Then we can catch it and take it to the zoo!"

"Fellas," Bob said, putting a hand on Emily's shoulder, "I would say we have a new client—provided you don't mind, Mrs Silverstone."

Emily's mother was surprised, but shook her head. "No, why should I. If you think you can find something, go ahead."

Pete turned to Emily, "Emily, shall we find the dragon for you?"

She looked at the Second Investigator with wide eyes. "What do I have to do?" she asked.

"Just say 'yes'," Pete said.

"Does it cost anything?"

"No."

"Yay!" Emily beamed at The Three Investigators.

"Then we can start solving the mystery right away," Jupiter said. "Mrs Silverstone, may I ask you a question?"

"Yes?" Mrs Silverstone said.

"When you heard about the dragon, you didn't seem the least bit surprised. In fact, that actually surprised me."

Instead of answering immediately, Mrs Silverstone turned to her daughter. "Emily, my dear... I suggest you go to your room now, what do you think?"

Emily was not thrilled. "Can I show Pete my room?"

"You'll have to ask Pete if he wants to come along."

"Pete, do you want to come?"

He threw a tortured glance at his friends.

"I think we can spare you for a moment," Jupiter said encouragingly.

"All right," Pete said and rose. "Show me your room, Emily."

When Pete and Emily had disappeared into the house, Mrs Silverstone continued: "You are right, Jupiter, the dragon story did not surprise me at all. Why should it? Emily's world is

populated with the most fantastic things and creatures—giants, goblins, trolls, magic flowers for the fairy queen... This is nothing new to me. One dragon more or less makes no difference.”

“We got a little impression of that on the way here,” Bob said.

Mrs Silverstone nodded. “I don’t know where she gets these stories from. Emily says the fairy queen told her about them. But it’s probably just made up too. When you showed up at the garden gate earlier, I thought you were behind it.”

She laughed for a moment, but immediately became serious again. “Wherever she picked up these fairy tales, Emily lives in a world of her own. She’ll be in school in a few months’ time, and I’m afraid the other kids will laugh at her as well. She’s always talking about things that no one else sees. I even took her to an eye doctor for this.”

“Dr Wakefield?” Bob guessed.

“Right. He examined Emily closely. I was almost hoping he’d find something—some kind of visual impairment that explains what’s going on with her. But of course, despite the numerous tests he’s run, he found nothing. He said she was just a normal kid with a vivid imagination. He said I should be proud of her instead of worrying.”

She sighed. “Well, maybe he’s right. But sometimes it’s difficult with her... like today.”

Jupiter nodded. “I see. You’re overlooking something, Mrs Silverstone. Emily was injured today, and it was by no means the product of an over-active childhood imagination. There is a strange creature loose in these woods.”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip, then he smiled. “And if we don’t want to disappoint you, we must find out what kind of creature that is.”

“And this,” said Emily, proudly pointing to a picture on the wall, “is a unicorn. Isn’t it great?”

“Hmm,” Pete murmured and nodded. He just saw a big yellow-coloured patch on a piece of paper. “Really great.”

Emily had half the room wallpapered with her pictures. Many of them were just painted yellow, others brightly coloured. In other aspects, it was the room of a normal six-year-old girl, including a Barbie dream house, coloured felt-tip pens and embroidered pillows in the doll’s bed.

Emily pulled a face. “You can’t see the unicorn.”

“What? Uh, yeah, sure. A great unicorn, really!”

“You can’t see it,” Emily continued. “But that’s not surprising... for it is an enchanted unicorn. Only I can see it.”

“I see,” Pete said and smiled. “I was wondering, you know...”

“I knew it! You know what?”

“No.”

“I’m going to find enchanted treasures in the forest.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. Just don’t tell anyone, okay?”

“Okay.”

Emily seemed relieved. She took the picture of the invisible unicorn off the wall and handed it to Pete. “Here... I give this to you!”

“Oh, thank you.” Pete looked at the paper, pretended to be happy, and folded it up.

“Emily!” cried Mrs Silverstone from outside. “Come down! Jupiter and Bob want to say goodbye!”



“Aw,” said Emily, disappointed. “Do you have to go already?”

“Well, we have to investigate now, you know?” Pete said.

“Investigate?”

“Yes. Find the dragon.”

“Oh, sure! Will you come back tomorrow?”

“Let’s see,” Pete said. “If we have any questions, I’m sure we’ll be back.”

They went downstairs and Emily told her mother: “The Three Investigators must now investigate.”

“I see,” Mrs Silverstone said smiling. Then she turned to The Three Investigators and said: “Then I wish you good luck! If you find the dragon, tell him I’m very angry with him!”

“We will,” Jupiter laughed. “Goodbye!”

“Look, Emily gave this to me,” Pete said and showed the unicorn picture to his friends as they stepped into the cool shadows of the forest.

“Well, we have a very unusual client,” Bob said in a good mood. “And she also picked out a favourite investigator, didn’t she, Pete?”

The Second Investigator grinned in agony. “Very funny.”

“There, there,” Jupiter rebuked. “Don’t mock him, Bob. It can’t hurt to have a good relationship with our client.”

“Yes, but does he have to hold her hand?” Bob continued mocking.

Pete rolled his eyes. “Could we please change the subject?”

“Gladly,” Jupe agreed. “You have the best sense of direction, Pete. Lead us back to the crime scene.”

“No problem.” Pete took the lead and soon they reached the small clearing where Emily had been attacked. On the field, their tracks were still clearly visible. A few fallen yellow flowers lay in the high grass.

“Hey!” Jupiter cried and picked something off the ground. Triumphant, he twisted an olive-green feather between his fingers.

“What is this?” Pete asked.

“A feather.”

“I can see that,” Pete said. “What feather? From what bird? What species? Genus? Family? I am expecting a little scientific lecture, Professor Jones!”

“Okay.” Jupiter cleared his throat. “Based on the size of the feather, I’d say the bird it belongs to is at least as big as a duck. But the colour is olive green... I can’t immediately think of any bird with such feathers. But look here on the ground... there are still small, soft feathers—so-called down. This indicates a fight.”

“A fight with a little six-year-old girl,” Bob added.

“Exactly.”

“But Emily clearly spoke of a dragon, not a bird,” Pete objected.

“There are no dragons, Pete,” replied Jupiter.

“I know that myself,” Pete said. “But Emily will know a bird from a dragon... and she has seen a dragon.”

“Emily also sees goblins and fairy queens,” Jupiter countered. “That’s a reason not to place undue importance on her visual judgement.”

“But even if you’re right, Jupe,” Bob interjected, “the question still remains—what bird would attack a human being? And above all, why?”

“That’s the big mystery, Bob. First of all, let’s find out what kind of bird this feather belongs to. An ornithologist should be able to help us.”

“What’s an ear specialist got to do with this?”

The First Investigator rolled his eyes. “An ear specialist is an otologist, Pete. What I’m saying is an ornithologist—a person who studies birds.”

“Oh, really?”

“Keeaaah!” A shrill scream from the air directed the eyes of The Three Investigators upwards.

An olive-green bird flew just above the tree tops of the adjoining forest. Its head was dominated by a long, sharply curved beak. The plumage seemed strangely scaled. It hovered over the heads of The Three Investigators in a descent flight, regained height with a flapping of its wings and disappeared into the trees at the other end of the field.

For a moment, they stared after the strange creature. Then The Three Investigators freed themselves from their stare.

“Fellas!” cried Pete. “We don’t need an ornithologist! We’ve just found our dragon!”

## 4. The Clairvoyant

Pete, Bob and Jupiter ran off. After only a few metres, the athletic Second Investigator had outdistanced the others. He stormed into the woods, jumped over the undergrowth and rushed through low brushwood. Then his gaze turned to the sky. Where was the bird? Had he already lost it?

Pete slowed down and finally stopped. There! The bird—or whatever it was—had landed on a branch and looked down.

Pete fixed his eyes on the bird. The curved beak was frightening. And the plumage really looked like a shiny scale armour because of its darkly bordered colouring. No wonder Emily had mistaken the bird for a dragon. Very slowly and carefully, so as not to frighten it, Pete approached the tree.

“What is it, Pete? Is it gone?” Jupiter yelled from behind.

“Keeeah!”

The bird rose fluttering in the air. But instead of climbing up and disappearing above the tree top from Pete’s view, it sailed underneath the canopy of leaves, between tree trunks and branches.

“Idiot!” Pete shouted to the First Investigator and started moving again.

It was clear to Pete—no human being in the world had a chance in a race against a bird. But it seemed as if the bird wanted to give him a chance. Over and over again it settled on a branch, waited until Pete had almost caught up with it, and then flew on.

But finally the bird had obviously had enough, pushed up through the leaves and disappeared from Pete’s field of vision.

The Second Investigator saw its shadow above the trees for a few seconds, then it disappeared. Pete ran on, running through fern fields, panting over moss-covered rocks, on, on and on in the direction he thought the bird was going.

There was more light. The trees receded. And finally the forest opened up into a long rocky valley where the grass was yellow and dried up. In the middle of the valley, there was a small wooden cabin, but Pete did not pay attention to it. He searched the sky.

There! The bird was only visible as a tiny speck. It had flown over the valley and landed on the other side—on an outstretched arm of a man! Pete could not believe his eyes. Over there, about a hundred metres away, the man stood in front of a green car and carried the bird on his arm. He spoke to it. The bird even seemed to listen. The man gave it something to eat, then he let the bird climb on his shoulder and got into the car with it.

Pete swore. Why was he standing there like a dummy? He ran down into the valley, but it was already too late. An engine started roaring and a moment later, the car disappeared in a cloud of dust. Soon only the birdsong and the rustling of the trees in the wind could be heard.

Then Bob and Jupiter trampled through the undergrowth and out of the forest.

“There you are... finally!” puffed Jupiter. “Don’t tell me you’ve really caught up with that stupid bird!”

“Man, you guys are lame!” complained Pete. “No, I haven’t caught up with the stupid bird. At least not after you scared it away with your roar, Juve. But I saw something incredible!” Pete told his friends what he had seen.

“He just got into the car with the bird?” Bob asked incredulously. “Did you get a closer look at the bird?”

“No, but I can tell that it is not a normal bird. It looked kind of weird. That pointy beak, and the scaly feathers... a bit like a bird of prey. But I’ve never seen one like that before.”

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully and pinched his lower lip. “At least now we know there’s actually something about the dragon. Emily didn’t make up the story. That thing attacked her, and it wasn’t an accident. The man in that car is behind this. Did you get the licence plate, Pete?”

Pete shook his head. “The car was really too far away for that. All I know is that it was green—a green Renault, but I could be wrong.”

“Hmm,” Jupiter said. “That’s not much. But maybe the occupant of that cabin there can help us.” He pointed down into the valley.

The cabin looked like a witch’s cottage from a fairy tale book—the dark wood was moss-covered and weathered, the roof was crooked and covered with shingles made of slate, every second one of which was broken.

“Do you think anyone lives there?” Bob asked doubtfully.

“What do you think?” Jupe asked.

“I don’t know.”

Jupiter gave him a reproachful look. “I expected more from you, Bob. Look at it! In front of the house there is a pile of firewood, in front of the windows hang colourful flower boxes, the windows are all still intact. Of course someone lives there.”

As if on command, the door of the cabin opened and a middle-aged woman in brightly coloured clothes and with fiery red hair stepped out. Around her neck and wrists she wore dozens of chains and pendants made of wood and roughly worked metal. She held a watering can in her hand, filled it up at a rain barrel and began to water the flowers.

When The Three Investigators stepped up to her, she looked up and gave them a friendly smile.

“Good afternoon, ma’am,” said Jupiter. “I’m sorry to disturb you. We have a few questions for you.”

“For me?” the lady wondered, eyeing The Three Investigators blatantly from top to bottom. “What are you, boy scouts or something? Or are you one of those crazy people who ride mountain bikes through muddy puddles all day, ruining pristine nature?”

“No,” Jupiter replied and cursed himself inwardly for the little mud fight in the afternoon. “I apologize for our appearance. It was adverse circumstances that led to... well, we don’t always look this way.”

He introduced himself and handed her their business card.

“Hmm... Jupiter Jones,” she murmured as she studied the card attentively. Then she looked at Jupiter closely for a few seconds.

Jupiter became uncomfortable. He cleared his throat and said: “Have we met before, Mrs...”

“Alruna. Just call me Alruna. No, we do not know each other... but I wonder...” She fell silent. Then she shook her head reluctantly and the smile returned to her face. “I want to get to know you. Would you like a cup of tea?”

“Gladly. We—” Jupiter started to reply.

“Fine. I’ll get some cups,” the lady said. “You guys stay out here. Such a beautiful day should be spent in the open air.”

Before Jupiter could reply, Alruna had already disappeared into the house. He looked at his friends questioningly.

“Don’t look at me like that,” whispered Pete. “I don’t know what she’s on to.”

A little later, Alruna returned, holding in her hands a wooden tray with four large, colourful cups. She placed it on a garden table in front of the house. “Sit down and grab a cup!”

The three of them went ahead and sat down on a bench next to the table. Pete reached for a cup and took a big sip of tea. It tasted like stale, heated water from a flower vase. His stomach turned. He had to use all his willpower not to spit out the tea—or whatever brew it was. Bravely he swallowed it. He smiled in agony.

Alruna did not seem to notice. “So, you investigators, what can I do for you?”

“It’s about a bird,” Jupiter began. “To be more precise—”

“The birdman!” Alruna gasped in horror. “I knew it! I knew it all along!”

“Uh... what?” Jupiter startled.

“You’re here for the birdman, aren’t you? I knew it the second I saw you. Jupiter, you are here to vanquish evil.”

The Three Investigators were speechless. They gave each other unsteady looks. Pete reached for his cup to cover up his insecurity. At the last moment, he remembered and put the tea down.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” Jupiter hesitantly began. “I’m afraid we don’t quite follow you.”

Alruna smiled. “Of course. How could you? I always forget that many people don’t see things as I do. If you must know, I am a clairvoyant.”

“Clairvoyant?” Pete asked.

“I can see events before they actually happen,” Alruna explained, looking Pete deep into his eyes. He immediately felt uncomfortable.

“So you’re a fortune-teller,” Pete surmised.

“No. Fortune tellers read from cards or crystal balls or palm lines. I don’t do that. A clairvoyant has extrasensory perception, the perception of things that are not present to the five senses. Some people call it ‘second sight’. It just comes to me without my being able to influence it. For example, I see a person and very likely, I’ll know something about him, if you know what I mean.”

“Uh...” Pete mumbled. “No.”

“I can see below the surface,” Alruna replied, gazing the Second Investigator. She did not blink once as she continued speaking. “I know who is facing me. I see the past, the present, and sometimes the future. I know what intentions a person has... and what fate awaits him... Not always... and not very precisely, but I see what a person is meant to do, where his path leads him. Do you understand?”

“Something like that,” Pete replied and swallowed.

“But what does that have to do with this birdman?” Jupiter asked.

Alruna’s face darkened. “That guy. He showed up here a few days ago in his green car and parked up at the end of the path that leads to my valley. I only had to see him once and it was clear to me. This man is up to no good. Mischief is upon the valley and upon the woods.”

“What has he done?” Jupe asked.

“He released a bird—a bird of prey. At first, I thought he wanted to release it into the wild but the man didn’t leave. He stopped, looked up at the sky and waited. After ten minutes, the bird finally came back and landed on his arm. He gave it something to eat and sent it off again. This went on four or five times. And the next day, he was back. And today too.”

“Do you have any idea what this is all about?” Jupe asked.

“He brings bad luck to the valley,” Alruna replied gloomily. “That’s all I know. But he can be stopped. I can see the birdman’s fate clearly in my inner eye. This misfortune can be stopped, and by a certain person—but I didn’t have an image of this person earlier. However, when I saw you a while ago, I knew you are the one.”

## 5. The World of the Fairy Queen

Jupiter's throat suddenly tightened.

"And you think that... that Jupiter is this person to prevent this misfortune?" Pete asked in amazement.

Alruna nodded slowly.

The First Investigator cleared his throat and said in a firm voice: "I prefer to stick to the facts, ma'am. And the fact is that an unidentified man is in possession of a trained bird which he lets fly over this area every day. Today, on one of his flights, the bird attacked a six-year-old girl who—"

"Emily?" Alruna interrupted him in shock. "That bird attacked Emily?"

"You know her?" Jupe asked.

"Emily Silverstone, of course. For goodness' sake, has something happened to her?"

"She has a few scratches, nothing serious," Jupe explained. "We happened to be in the area and took her to a doctor and then home."

"That's why we're here," Bob went on. "Emily has asked us to find the bird that attacked her."

"By the way, she claims it wasn't a bird, but a dragon," Pete added.

"I can imagine that," Alruna replied. She seemed a little surprised as Emily's mother.

"May I ask how do you know Emily?" Jupiter said.

"Emily often plays in the forest," Alruna said. "Eventually, she discovered my house here and we became friends. Since then, she has been coming to visit me regularly. She's only six, but we have the same vibe, you know? I felt it from the beginning. Emily is special. And she's such a nice girl. She always brings me flowers she picked in the forest."

"Flowers!" cried Jupiter. "Flowers for the fairy queen!"

"Yes, that's what she always calls me! Did she tell you that?"

"Yes, she... she spoke of you," Bob replied. "We just didn't realize you were a real person."

Alruna laughed. "It's not so easy to keep track in this tangle of elves, dragons and other mythical creatures. We often tell each other stories, you know—of forest elves and trolls. Emily tells me what wondrous creatures she saw in the forest. Well, she may not have seen them, but I believe she can sense their presence. Then I make a fairy tale out of it. That's why she calls me her fairy queen."

Pete swallowed. He hardly dared to ask his next question. "Can... can you see these mythical creatures?"

Alruna shook her head smiling. "Unfortunately no. I wish I could. But I have to rely on perceiving it with other senses than my eyes."

"With other senses?" Pete was puzzled.

"Well, you know. Sometimes you can sense that there's something else, right? That you're not alone... that the world around us is populated with the spirits of nature," Alruna elaborated. "They are all around us. They protect us, they inspire us, sometimes they annoy us. Things disappear and suddenly reappear. They're right in front of you, even though you know they weren't there a minute ago." She shrugged her shoulders. "Goblins."

“Or a stress-related lack of concentration,” Jupiter coolly suggested.

“Ah, Jupiter Jones—the righteous and rational logician,” Alruna said with slight mockery in her voice. “Your life is also influenced by nature spirits, whether you want to admit it or not. If you have a flash of inspiration, for example.”

“Oh, Jupiter has a lot of that!” said Pete.

Alruna smiled. “Well, the spirits must mean well by whispering to you over and over again.”

Jupiter raised his right eyebrow. “When I have a brainstorm, it’s solely the result of the chemical reactions that take place in the network of synaptic connections in my brain, which has been optimized by constant training of my intellect.”

“I don’t expect anyone to share my view of the world,” Alruna said. “You have a right to believe what you want, Jupiter.”

“Strictly speaking, I don’t just believe things as it is,” Jupiter countered. “I base my understanding on scientific facts and evidences.”

“Sure, that’s your choice,” Alruna said. “And if you don’t accept the existence of nature spirits, that’s fine too. But Emily sees or senses them.”

“You mean she has... second sight too?” Pete asked.

Alruna shook her head. “No. I don’t believe Emily can see the future. Her perception is much more direct and immediate. She sees or senses something—objects and creatures that remain hidden from other people. And if Emily says this thing that attacked her was not a bird, but a dragon—”

“Then that is a sign of her vivid imagination,” Jupiter interrupted her abruptly.

“You shouldn’t simply dismiss it as childish nonsense,” Alruna objected. “The world is not that simple. That is the only thing I can say to you.”

Jupiter sighed heavily. “Let us come to the point. This bird, whatever it was, attacked Emily. It belongs to a man who has been driving a green Renault to the edge of the valley for several days. What else did you observe, Alruna? Can you describe the stranger to us? Do you know the licence plate of the car? Or anything else?”

Alruna shook her head. “It has a California plate, I know that much. And the man... well, he looked perfectly average—medium height, medium weight, medium age, dark hair... except for his aura. It was really sombre. But I suppose you’re only interested in physical attributes that you can see with your own eyes.”

“Indeed,” Jupe said.

“Then I’m afraid I’ll have to pass,” Alruna said.

“All right,” Jupe continued. “What time did this man show up here in the last few days?”

“I don’t have a watch. But it was always in the afternoon.”

“Fine. Then I propose the following strategy—we will wait here tomorrow afternoon for the birdman, provided you don’t mind us turning your house into a surveillance base for a short time.”

“Not at all. The sooner this guy goes away, the better.”

“Good. I’m curious about the mystery man and his mystery bird.”

“Well, if you ask me—I know you won’t, but still—that Alruna was really scary,” Pete said on the way back.

It was late afternoon by now, the sun was already low in the sky. Mosquitoes were romping in the air. Most of the birds had already retreated into the dense tree tops. The Three



Investigators hurried to get to Pete's car. Bob ran a little behind the others. He was busy with his notebook.

"Scary?" Jupiter asked doubtfully. "Well, if that's how you look at it. Weird, yes. You don't believe that fortune telling stuff she was telling us, do you?"

"Well," Pete said reluctantly. "At least she foresaw your visit. Don't you find that interesting?"

"Foreseen?" The First Investigator laughed contemptuously. "Just because she was rambling on about me preventing some misfortune? I beg you, Pete. At best, it was pure luck. At worst, she just pulled that story out to impress us. I don't believe a word of her esoteric stuff."

Pete was silent. Of course Jupiter didn't believe Alruna's words, but that did not change the fact that Pete was still impressed by this woman. The way she had looked at him... Pete had had the feeling that Alruna could see right to the bottom of his soul. But of course, he wouldn't mention any of this to Jupiter.

"What do you say, Bob?" Jupiter turned around and asked Bob.

Bob looked up from his notes. "Excuse me?"

"Were you even listening?"

"No, I'm busy."

"What are you doing that's so important?" Jupe asked.

"I'm writing some stuff down. So much has happened today, I'm afraid we'll forget something important."

Jupiter shook his head. "Bob Andrews—our Records and Research man is always dutiful."

"More like duty-bound, if you ask me," joked Pete.

"It's probably completely unnecessary," Jupe said. "Thanks to Alruna's new information on the birdman, we may be able to close this case tomorrow."

"Oh, oh," Pete said ominously. "Don't say such things, Jupe! Whenever you claim that everything is very simple, the truth is that we are already on the brink of an abyss and are only a few seconds away from the next disaster—"

"Keeeah!"

The Three Investigators flinched. The scream came directly from above. Through the dense canopy of leaves they saw a shadow flying over their heads.

"After it!" cried Bob, stuffing his notebook in his pocket and running off.

"Didn't I tell you!" Pete yelled. "Didn't I tell you something will happen?"

"Calm down, Pete!" gasped Jupiter. "If we get hold of the... birdman... now... the case... can be... solved."

They rushed out of the forest onto the dirt road from which they had started their hike. Pete's MG was parked on the left. A hundred metres further, the dirt road met the main road, and on the right, a green wall rose up—a two-metre-high corn field, which blocked their path and view with its endless, dead-straight rows of plants. The Three Investigators looked up at the sky.

"There it is!" cried Bob. "Now it is flying towards the middle of the corn field. If we run in there, we'll lose him. The corn plants would block our view. We must—"

Bang! That was a deafening shot.

"Keeaaaaah!"

The bird twitched, tumbled in the air and lost height. The left wing fluttered, slowed the fall, then it disappeared from their sight. For a moment, The Three Investigators were frozen in terror.

“What was that?” Pete asked.

“Somebody shot the bird!” cried Bob.

“Oh gosh!” Pete gasped. “But who? And why?”

Jupiter’s brain was running at full speed. They needed a plan, and fast! “The shot came from there!” he said, pointing to the left. “Pete, we’re looking for the shooter! Bob, you run into the corn field and try to find and rescue the bird. If I’m not mistaken, it’s just been shot. Maybe it survived the fall. We’ll meet you at the car. Go!”

Bob did not hesitate for a second and disappeared into the corn field.

Pete and Jupiter ran down the path on the left. There was no one to be seen on the way, and on both sides, the forest and the corn field blocked their view.

“He shot from the road!” Pete cried and pointed ahead, where the field path led onto the tarred country road. “From there you have a good view of the corn field and—”

An engine started. The car had to be right on the road, but they couldn’t see it.

“He’s going away!” cried Jupiter.

But Pete was already one step ahead of him. He ran to his MG, pulled the key from his pocket, opened the door and jumped in. The wheels went spinning in the dust as he turned and accelerated. In a brown cloud, he came to a halt next to Jupiter. “You have exactly one tenth of a second to get into the car!”

The First Investigator was not quite sitting down yet, when Pete already stepped on the accelerator. Hurriedly Jupiter fingered the seat belt and buckled himself in. He would have liked to have secured himself double and triple. They reached the road and looked to the right. Just at that moment a silver BMW disappeared behind a hilltop.

“After it!” Jupiter urged.

Pete stepped on the accelerator and shot out into the main road with squealing tyres. It headed west towards Rocky Beach and as they drove over the hilltop, the evening sun shone directly in their faces and blinded them,

“There he is!” Jupiter yelled. “Come on, Pete, you can do it!”

“Of course I can do it,” Pete said. A strange calm had taken possession of him. Jupiter might be the wisest of them all, Bob the more level-headed, but when it came to chasing a strange car, Pete was just the right man for the job.

He was completely in his element. Even on the wildest chase, he kept a cool head. “Should I stop him or just chase him?” he asked.

The First Investigator pondered for a moment. “Pursuit. The guy has a gun. I don’t want to take any chances. Keep your distance, he hasn’t noticed we’re after him yet.”

Suddenly the silver car accelerated.

“I’d say, he just noticed us,” Pete said. “And now what?”

“Now we change strategy. Full speed ahead, Pete!”

## 6. Wild Chase

Pete shot the speedometer needle up. The narrow country road led from some remote small towns in the mountains to the coast and was only little used. With good reason too—the road was not without danger. Many motorists avoided the narrow curves clapped close to the mountain with the yawning abysses on one side and the jagged rock faces on the other, preferring a small detour on a better developed track.

“Look out, Pete, the bend!” Jupe yelled.

“I can see that. Don’t panic. I’ve got it under control!” Pete stepped on the brakes, took the corner slowly and with the necessary respect and immediately accelerated again. The BMW had already disappeared behind the next bend. “That guy’s not bad either, but he has no chance against Pete Crenshaw.”

“Watch it, Pete! Don’t be a hero!” Jupe said. “If you think he’s too good, we’ll call off the chase before we get stuck on the next rock face—”

“Are you trying to insult me?” Pete asked.

The Second Investigator took the next turn faster. His speed pushed him into the oncoming lane. It was not without danger, but the risk was worth it as he had come a little closer to the silver car. In the next minute, the road went almost straight ahead. The silver car sped up and Pete accelerated to keep up the pursuit.

“Pete, there’s a sharp right turn up ahead!” Jupe yelled.

“Don’t drive me crazy, Jupe! I’m not blind, okay?” Pete said as the BMW slowed down. “Ha! He’s scared! We’re almost there.”

The other driver drove along the rock face exceeding the speed limit. Pete reduced his speed only slightly and rushed around the bend. Now he was completely on the left lane. Right next to the driver’s door, the abyss yawned.

“Pete! Are you out of your mind? You couldn’t even see the curve!” Jupe warned. “If someone is coming towards us—”

“We’re right behind him!” Pete ignored the First Investigator. “Now all I have to do is —” He stepped on the accelerator, “overtake!”

“Aaaaaaahhh!”

Jupiter grabbed the door handle and closed his eyes. No, that was even worse. He opened his eyes again and saw the BMW veering off to the left, just before Pete managed to get next to him. Pete braked sharply. “That rascal! He’ll see!”

He steered back into the right lane and looked past the silver car. About a hundred metres ahead of them came a sharp right turn. “Ha!” cried Pete. “Now we’ve got him!”

“What are you up to?” Jupiter asked anxiously. “I know that curve there. It’s an S-curve, right after that it goes to the left. It looks very dangerous, and you are going too fast!”

“But this guy doesn’t know that,” Pete said confidently. “He’s gonna make too much of a left turn and then I’m gonna pass him on the right. He won’t expect that!”

“Are you sure that—” Jupe warned, but it was already too late. The silver BMW raced around the bend, and Pete went after it.

“No!” cried Pete.

There! The left turn! But unlike what was expected, the BMW stayed exactly on track. Pete didn't have the slightest chance of passing him on the right.

"He knows these roads as well as you do, Pete," Jupiter remarked.

"I can tell," growled Pete. "All right. Take a left."

The Second Investigator was wildly determined. All he had in his sights was the bumper of the BMW which he had to pass. Nothing else mattered. Pete accelerated again and turned the steering wheel around.

"Ha!" cried Pete triumphantly as he slowly pushed himself beside the other car. He wouldn't dare to push Pete off the road! Just a moment more and they would be able to see the driver's face...

Tooooooooooooooooooot!

The Second Investigator flinched and looked ahead. A grey truck came towards them and horned like a madman. It was a pretty wide truck!

Bob ran. The rough leaves of the corn plants hit him in the face. He could only see half a metre away. After a short time, he realized that this was a hopeless undertaking. How could he find an injured bird in the middle of this huge field if he could only see as far as the next corn cob? If he was not careful, he might step on the bird. Besides, he had completely lost his orientation. How far had he already run? Twenty metres? Fifty?

He stopped. And listened. Was there a noise? A croak? Bob ran a few steps in the appropriate direction. There it was, very quietly—"Kra!"

So Jupiter was right, the bird was indeed still alive! Bob started moving again, parting the plant stems with his arms like a swimmer. The cawing became louder and louder. And there it lay! The bird was as large as a crow, with scale-like, olive-green plumage and a narrow, crooked and very pointed beak. It lay on its side and fluttered helplessly, but was unable to move, let alone fly.

"Shh!" Bob went and knelt down next to the bird. "Take it easy."

He stretched out his hand carefully. The bird pecked at it. "Ouch!"

Blood poured from Bob's finger, but the bird made no further attempt to fight back. Bob managed to lift it up.

He watched the bird carefully. Bob had not the slightest idea about birds, but it seemed as if the bullet had pierced the wing. The best thing to do was to take him to a vet immediately!

Bob rose. Suddenly, he heard a noise. Something rustling. Someone moved through the corn field behind him! He turned around.

For a split second, he saw another dark shadow rushing towards him, then something hit him in the temple and threw his head to the side. The dull pain clouded his senses. Bob fell to his knees and fought against passing out. But then a wave of colourful dots rolled over him and the ground tipped under him.

A second later, he saw and heard nothing more.

Tooooooooooooooooooot! The truck raced towards them.

Pete was still in the middle of an overtaking manoeuvre. "I can still do this!"

"No way!"

"Yes, I do."

"No! Pete! Pete!"

Tooooooooooooooooooot!

Damn it! Jupiter was right. He didn't make it. Pete hit the brakes and let the MG fall back behind the BMW.

But it was already too late. The truck driver also braked and the BMW started to lurch.

"What's that idiot doing?" Pete cried.

"He's braking!" hissed Jupiter. "Because he was afraid that any moment you would... Aaaaaaaaahhh!"

The truck slid to the side. Pete slammed his foot into the brake pedal. Tyres squealed. The MG went sideways.

The truck too... and the BMW squeezed past the truck and raced away.

Pete and the truck came to a halt. The truck was now blocking the entire roadway. There was no chance to get past it.

"What a bloody mess!" cried Pete, hammering on the steering wheel.

"Man, Pete!" yelled Jupiter. "Do you know how close that was?"

"Yes! I almost had him!"

"No. We almost got killed!"

"Nonsense! If you hadn't yelled at me all of a sudden, I could have easily passed him!"

The truck driver got out. He was a short, fat, unshaven man in a stained jumpsuit.

"Are you out of your senses?" he shouted.

"What are you talking about?" Pete exploded. "Whose vehicle is blocking the road? Mine or yours?"

"You little brat! You young rascals think you can do anything, don't you? I'm gonna report you!"

"How about clearing the road first before you plunge other people to their doom?"

For a moment, the driver was speechless. Then he grumbled: "You have gone completely crazy! Smear mud all over yourselves and play in the middle of the street. This country is doomed! You should be spanked!"

Pete didn't reply anymore, but stared at the man only sincerely. Finally the man growled something obnoxious and climbed behind the wheel, backed up and put the truck back on its track.

As the truck rolled past the MG, the truck driver wound the window down. "In my day, the Sheriff would have put you in jail!" Then he angrily drove away.

Pete grumbled something under his breath and looked at Jupiter. "And now what?"

The First Investigator took a deep breath. "This action was completely unnecessary, Pete."

"Don't bother me now, Juve! I was good! I had it under control. And I almost had the guy! No one could have known that the stupid truck was coming."

"Yes, all right." Jupiter saw things a little differently. In his eyes, Pete had acted very recklessly. But the Second Investigator was already upset enough. One wrong word from Jupiter and he would probably explode. "Let's go back. Bob will be wondering where we are."

Pete turned and drove at a leisurely pace back towards the forest. Nobody spoke a word until the MG turned into the dirt road.

Pete parked the car at the edge of the forest and they got out. Bob came towards them. He swayed slightly and held his head. A small trickle of blood ran down his cheek.

"Bob!" Jupiter cried and ran towards him. "What happened?"

"The usual," Bob groaned and sank down on the dusty dirt road. "I got hit on the head."

"What?"

“In the corn field. There was this guy. Maybe it wasn’t a guy. I don’t know. Anyway, the bird was hurt and...” Bob fell silent and stared into space.

“Now calm down first,” Jupiter said and took a bottle of water from his backpack. He wet a handkerchief and carefully dabbed the wound on Bob’s forehead. “It doesn’t look that bad.”

“Feels bad, though,” moaned Bob.

“It stopped bleeding,” Pete noted. “Wait, there’s a first-aid kit in the car. I’ll get you a plaster.”

“Did you bring headache pills? I think I’ve got a jack hammer pounding in my head,” Bob moaned. “Man, why does it always have to be me?”

“Because it is your destiny, Alruna would say,” Jupiter said. “But now tell us what happened.”

Bob told about his experiences in the corn field.

“And you couldn’t recognize the man?” Jupe asked.

“As I said, I don’t even know if it was a man. All I saw was this baseball bat or whatever it was racing towards me. I don’t know how long I was out. When I woke up, the person and the bird were gone.”

“We haven’t had any luck either,” Pete said and told about their chase. “Well, we failed across the board, fellas.”

“Not on the whole,” Bob objected and watered the handkerchief again to hold it to his forehead. “I strongly suspect that you all remember the licence number of the car.”

“The... the licence plate?” Pete stuttered.

## 7. *Nestor Notabilis*

“Oh, no! The licence plate!” Pete cried.

“Are you saying you didn’t see it?” Bob asked.

“I... I had other things to do.”

“Don’t panic!” Jupiter said appeasingly. “I’ve memorized it.”

Bob reached into his back pocket. He wanted to write the number down in his notebook. But the notebook was not there. He searched all the other bags—in vain. “Darn! My notebook is gone! I must have lost it running through the corn field.”

“We don’t really need it,” Jupiter said. “You know that when I remember something, I will hardly forget it.”

“That may be, but I still need my notebook! I wrote all sorts of things in it!” He picked himself up and went to the place where he had run into the corn field. “But we’ll find it in no time at all, because my tracks are right there.”

Together they set out and searched the corn field. All they had to do was follow the corn plants bent to the side, but the search proved to be more difficult than expected, because it was now rapidly getting darker and only little daylight penetrated the thick corn leaves.

Finally they reached the place where Bob had fallen. The traces of the attacker were also clearly visible. But there was no trace of the notebook.

“Bummer!” Bob muttered. “It’s gotta be here somewhere!”

“Not necessarily,” Jupiter said. “It is also possible that the assailant took it while you were unconscious.”

“That would be fatal,” Bob said. “I have recorded everything that happened today... if he reads it—”

“—He’ll know as much as we do,” Jupiter finished the sentence.

“Excuse me,” Pete interfered, “but what’s wrong with that? We don’t know anything. This day was just crammed with weirdness.”

“Nevertheless, it is possible that these peculiarities are valuable clues to certain people.” Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “I must confess however that, at present, I find it difficult to grasp the wealth of information and place it in a logical pattern.”

“That calms me down a lot, Juve,” Pete said. “Perhaps it would help you if we followed the assailant’s trail.”

Jupiter looked at Pete in surprise. “Good idea, Pete! Let’s do it now!”

But the attempt was unsuccessful. The Three Investigators were able to follow the trail without any problems to the other end of the corn field, but there it got lost on a grassy path.

“Okay, it was worth a try,” Jupiter said. “Let’s note that the assailant disappeared without a trace, along with the bird and possibly the notebook.”

“Now what?” Pete asked.

“Now,” sighed the First Investigator, “let’s go back to Headquarters. There’s something I want to show you.”

“For goodness’ sake, what do you look like?” Mathilda Jones was just about to close the gate to The Jones Salvage Yard when The Three Investigators arrived. “I thought you were going

hiking!”

“Please don’t ask, Aunt Mathilda,” Jupe said.

“Did you two have a fight?”

“No.”

“Of course you did!”

She looked at Bob briskly. “Or what else does that patch on your forehead mean, Bob Andrews?”

“I, uh, fell,” Bob replied and found that this was actually the truth—at least a part of the truth.

“Aunt Mathilda, do you know where the boxes of books that Uncle Titus bought last week?” Jupiter changed the subject.

“Well, where should they be?” Mathilda quipped. “They are where they always are until you’re comfortable sorting them.”

“I’ll do it tomorrow,” Jupiter promised.

He then went to a roofed stand at the edge of the salvage yard. Dozens of crates full of books, crockery and other odds and ends piled up under the rain cover.

“What are we doing here, Jupe?” moaned Pete. “I’d actually like to go home and take a hot shower for an hour.”

“And fall into bed afterwards,” Bob added. “I’m completely exhausted. My head’s about to burst. This day was really something.”

“You can go after this,” promised Jupiter, while he opened box after box and rummaged through the books. “I just need your opinion for a moment. I’m sure that I saw a book in one of these boxes that... ah, here it is.” He held a huge illustrated book under the nose of his friends.

“*The Complete Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds*,” Bob read. “I think I know what you’re getting at.”

“You both saw the bird—especially you, Bob. You saw it up close,” Jupe said. “If you can find it in this book, we’ll be one step ahead.”

Pete and Bob became absorbed in the thick volume. There were hundreds of illustrations, but none of them even looked like the strange bird.

“I don’t know,” mumbled Pete as they had already worked through over half the book. “Somehow, our bird doesn’t seem to exist. Who knows, maybe Emily was right and it really was something else entirely.”

“A dragon? With feathers and a beak? Forget it, Pete,” Bob remarked. “I had that beast in my hands. It was a bird. I just have no idea what kind.”

They continued to turn the pages until almost the end of the book. “There!” Bob and Pete cried simultaneously.

Curious, the First Investigator bent over the picture.

“This is it,” Bob said. “One hundred percent!”

“A kea,” Jupiter read. “A New Zealand alpine parrot... Interesting... It is mostly olive green with a brilliant orange under its wings and has a large, narrow, curved, grey-brown upper beak... A parrot would have been the last thing on my mind... Hmm, there’s not much here about the kea, just where it came from and what it looks like. Bob—”

“All right,” Bob interrupted him. “My job is to do research on the kea. You want all available information latest by tomorrow.”

“Exactly.”

“You got it, chief.”



“Great. And then we’ll solve the mystery of the birdman, Emily and the gunman in the silver BMW, as sure as my name is Jupiter Jones!”

“Yeah?” The voice of the man at the other end sounded strange.

“Hello, this is Jupiter Jones. I would like to speak to Inspector Cotta.”

“He’s not here,” growled the man.

“Will he be back this afternoon?”

“No.”

Jupiter tried to remain polite. “In the evening perhaps?”

“No. He’s on vacation.”

“I see. And who am I speaking to?”

“Kershaw. Inspector Kershaw.”

The name rang Jupiter’s inner alarm bell—Kershaw! The Three Investigators had met him before. When Cotta was away, Kershaw once covered the inspector’s duties at the Rocky Beach Police Department. Inspector Kershaw could not stand The Three Investigators—and the feeling was mutual.

“Oh!” Jupiter remarked.

“I remember you, Jupiter Jones,” Kershaw said threateningly. “And whatever you want, you’ve come to the wrong place.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“You’re wasting my time.”

“No. I’m wasting my phone charges. Have a nice day, Inspector Kerarsch... uh, Kershaw.” Jupiter hung up. Insulting people based on their name was not usually his style. But he was happy to make an exception in the case of Inspector Kershaw.

Half an hour later, Bob and Pete entered Headquarters.

Bob waved a bunch of papers. “Fellas, I’ve been a busy man and now I’m a kea expert.”

“Go for it!” Jupe urged.

Bob was flipping through his papers. “The kea lives in the mountains of New Zealand. With the scientific name of *Nestor notabilis*, it is, as we already know, a parrot—in fact, it is the world’s only alpine parrot. However, it is not closely related to other species of parrots, and this is also a reason for its unusual appearance.

“When you see it in the air, the kea looks more like a bird of prey. It is considered a very intelligent bird, some people even consider it as the world’s smartest bird. Keas are hardly afraid of people, on the contrary. They are so curious that they approach strange creatures and objects without any shyness.

“Anything they don’t know will be closely examined. Famous and at the same time notorious is the kea for its distinct play instinct. They roll around in the snow, do crazy tricks and so on. That’s why they are also known as the ‘clowns of the mountains’.”

“And why are they notorious?” Pete asked.

“Because keas will pick apart anything that gets in their way—tents, backpacks, cars, bikes. Their beaks are very strong and sharp and have incredible destructive power—as you can see.” Bob held up his injured finger and continued: “The kea is an endangered species—with only a few thousand individuals left. Well, that’s the short version.”

“Hmm...” Jupiter thought about it. “Somehow I had hoped for something else.”

“What?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know. Something that will help us.”

“Well, intelligent sounds good,” Pete thought. “That means keas are easy to train, right?”

“I didn’t find anything about that,” Bob confessed. “But it is reasonable to assume that parrots are generally very easy to train—not only at imitating human speech, but at all kinds of tricks. What exactly did your call to Cotta reveal, Jupe? Will he help us find the shooter?”

The First Investigator’s face darkened. “Cotta is on vacation. Guess who I had on the line... Inspector Kershaw.”

“Oh, no,” Pete moaned.

“Oh, yes. And it’s obvious we can’t expect any help from him. We’ll have to think of something else.”

The phone rang. Jupiter switched on the loudspeaker. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

“Jupiter? This is Mrs Silverstone, Emily’s mother.”

“Mrs Silverstone! What can I do for you?”

For a moment, it was quiet on the other end of the line. Then she gasped: “Emily has disappeared.”

“Excuse me?”

“She’s been gone since this morning! Something must have happened! Please, you have to find her!”

## 8. Perplexed

Mrs Silverstone paced up and down like a wounded predator, gnawing at her thumbnail. Again and again she stopped at the window and looked out, searching the street for Emily. Nothing. The Three Investigators watched her helplessly as she wandered through the house.

Mrs Silverstone had sent Emily out shopping in the morning. She hadn't come back from there. It had been seven hours. Mrs Silverstone had searched the nearby woods for Emily, asked the neighbours and phoned the supermarket. Emily had not shown up. Then her mother called the police. But the officer on the phone had made it very clear to her that a person had to be missing for twenty-four hours before the police could do anything.

"Twenty-four hours," Mrs Silverstone muttered in a desperate rage. "What are they thinking? Who knows what could happen in twenty-four hours! Emily is missing! I don't have to wait twenty-four hours to know that!"

"That's just the usual procedure," Jupiter tried to calm her down. "Many missing persons reappear within a few hours. And who knows, maybe it's the same with Emily. Maybe she just went back into the woods to play and—"

"For seven hours?" Mrs Silverstone shook her head vigorously. Suddenly, her eyes filled with tears. "I... I would have looked for her long ago, but what if she comes home or calls and I'm not here? I know we don't really know each other, but..."

"You don't have to say anymore, Mrs Silverstone," Jupiter interrupted her. "We're going to find Emily."

"You'd really do that?" Mrs Silverstone asked.

"That goes without saying," said Pete. "Where do you think we should start looking?"

"In the woods," Mrs Silverstone replied without hesitation. "I'm sure she was there this morning."

Jupiter pondered for a moment whether he should tell Mrs Silverstone about her experiences yesterday with Alruna, the kea and the chase, but that would have only worried her even more. He was silent.

Bob got up. "Well, we'd better not waste any time."

It had become even hotter. But unlike the day before, the forest offered no protection from the heat today. Under the dense, heavy canopy of leaves, the heat had accumulated as if under a huge bell. Not even the slightest breath of wind moved. The trees seemed to solidify into green wax.

Jupiter had decided to visit Dr Wakefield and Alruna to ask them about Emily. Maybe she had been with them. Silently, The Three Investigators walked along the trail and turned their eyes left and right, desperately searching for any trace.

They were unsuccessful. There were no traces. All three were thinking about Emily. They were very concerned about the little girl. Finally, they reached Dr Wakefield's house.

Wakefield wasn't sitting on his porch today, but the back door was open and a loud exchange of words came out.

"You leave my house immediately, or I'll call the police!" That was definitely Dr Wakefield's voice.

“What’s going on?” Bob asked.

“Dr Wakefield is in trouble,” Pete said and moved ahead. But the First Investigator held him back by the shoulder. “What’s wrong, Jupe? It sounds like Dr Wakefield surprised a burglar. Shouldn’t we help him?”

“First I want to hear if you are right with your assumption, Pete,” Jupe whispered and crept closer to the verandah. Below the wooden railing, The Three Investigators took cover. From here, they heard every single word.

“We know you’re up to something, Wakefield. I’m warning you! Don’t get in our way.” The man had a huge bass voice that made Pete shudder. From the voice, he estimated the stranger to be a huge man.

“I’d really like to get out of your way, Mr Lake, if I knew what you are talking about.” Dr Wakefield sounded upset, but not scared.

“Don’t try to mess with me, Wakefield! You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“Your aunt was my patient, nothing more. I have nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with your inheritance matters. I have no idea where you got this absurd idea. Did your aunt leave me something? No.”

“I don’t care how you try to make excuses. We know you’re playing a double game, and so I warn you one last time—if you continue to interfere in our affairs, you will regret it!”

Now Dr Wakefield got angry. “Get out of my house now or I’ll report you for trespassing!”

“We’ll leave you alone if you leave us alone,” said the stranger threateningly.

Then footsteps departed. A door clicked and on the other side of the house someone got into a car and drove away.

The Three Investigators looked at each other at a loss. “We saw and heard nothing, understand?” whispered Jupiter emphatically.

They waited a minute or so, then Jupiter rose from his cover, went up the porch stairs and called out: “Dr Wakefield? Are you there? It’s us, The Three Investigators!”

A moment later, Tiberius Wakefield stepped through the open door. He looked confused. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

“We’re sorry to come at a bad time, but it’s about Emily,” Jupiter said.

“What about Emily?” Dr Wakefield asked indignantly.

“When did you last see her?”

“Pardon? Well, yesterday—when you brought her here. What kind of question is that?”

“Emily has disappeared,” Jupiter replied and explained to Dr Wakefield in brief what this was all about. The doctor looked horrified from one to the other. Then his gaze wandered into the void, his thoughts seemed to be very far away and he didn’t even listen anymore.

“Dr Wakefield?” Jupiter asked when he had finished. “Are you all right?”

“What? Yes, yes, of course. Poor Mrs Silverstone! She must be worried! I hope the kidnapper won’t hurt her.”

“The kidnapper?” Jupiter was alarmed. “What makes you think Emily was kidnapped?”

Dr Wakefield cleared his throat. “Well, isn’t that obvious?”

“Not really. There are plenty of other possibilities.”

Dr Wakefield thought for a moment. “You may be right. I’m sorry I can’t be of more help to you. If you hear anything new, let me know, huh?”

“All right, sir,” Jupiter replied, disappointed. Bob and Pete wanted to leave, but the First Investigator had the feeling that something needed to be clarified. He turned around and took a shot in the dark: “Dr Wakefield?”

“Yeah?”

"Forgive me, but when we reached your house, we overheard parts of a conversation between you and your visitor. It was not our intention to eavesdrop, but—"

Tiberius Wakefield's face became icy. "But what?"

"Well, I was wondering if maybe you have some trouble we can help you with."

Dr Wakefield laughed his head off. "Certainly not, Jupiter... and I don't see what this has to do with Emily's disappearance."

"Probably nothing at all..."

"Absolutely nothing," Wakefield said emphatically. "Call me if you find out anything about Emily." He turned around and went back into the house.

Even Alruna could not help them. She had not seen Emily for days. Her face was full of worry as she silently listened to the report of The Three Investigators on the bench outside the house. But she did not seem particularly surprised or even shocked. "I suspected it."

"What did you suspect?" Bob asked.

"That something terrible would happen. When you told me yesterday that Emily was attacked by that bird, I had a dark premonition."

"What... what premonition?" Pete asked.

"That this was only the prelude to a much worse catastrophe." Alruna leaned forward and looked intensely into the eyes of one after the other. "Emily is in great danger. I can feel it. The birdman has something to do with it. You must find him and prevent him from causing harm!"

"So you really think this is all connected?" Bob asked.

Alruna nodded. "I am firmly convinced."

Jupiter swallowed a snappy remark. He did not believe in Alruna's premonitions, but there was no point in discussing it with her. "We'll try to solve the mystery," he said as objectively as possible. "But to do that, we shall need all the help we can get. Do you have any idea where else we might look? Did Emily ever mention to you a place that she frequents that her mother doesn't know about?"

Alruna shrugged her shoulders. "Her favourite place is the Dragon's Eye."

"The what?" Pete asked.

"The Dragon's Eye—you know, the brightly painted arrangement of rocks near the hiking trail. I told her a fairy tale about it once."

"—Of the petrified dragon?" Pete remembered.

Alruna nodded. "It's her favourite story. Since then, she goes there almost every day."

"We'll have a look at that place," Jupiter said.

The Three Investigators said goodbye. While walking, Jupiter remembered something else. He turned around. "Do you know Dr Wakefield?"

"Not personally. I just know he's an ophthalmologist and lives on the other side of the woods."

"Hmm," Jupiter went. "And does the name 'Lake' mean anything to you?"

"Martha Lake? Of course."

The First Investigator paused. "Martha Lake?"

"Yes. The artist who created the Dragon's Eye. That's who you're talking about, right?"

"Uh, no," Jupiter admitted. "Actually, no. I had a Mr Lake in mind."

"I don't know anything about a Mr Lake. Martha wasn't married... and she didn't have any children. I should know as I had known her for a long time."

"Had?" Jupiter remarked.

“Yes. Unfortunately, she died last year. She was a good friend of mine, you know.” Alruna looked pensive into the distance, as if she could see her deceased friend there. Then she returned to reality. “But if you are talking about a Mr Lake, no, I’m sorry, I never heard of him... unless you mean one of her nephews.”

“Nephews?” Jupiter listened.

“Yes, Martha had many brothers and sisters who had many children. Of course, they are all grown up now. But tell me, what has all this got to do with Emily?”

“Well yes,” Jupiter replied hesitantly and thought about how much he wanted to tell Alruna. “Dr Wakefield had a visit from a Mr Lake. When we talked to him about it, he said it had nothing to do with Emily’s disappearance. He made such a strong case for it, however, that I suspected the exact opposite. There is a connection between Emily and this Mr Lake, but Dr Wakefield refused to say anything about it.”

Alruna frowned. “This is strange. There is indeed a connection—between Martha and Emily, though.”

“Really?” Bob wondered. “How so?”

“In a way, they are very similar.”

“Similar?” Pete asked. “How can an old woman and a six-year-old girl be similar?”

“They had similar interests and... talents. Their aura was of the same colour.”

“Their aura?” Jupiter repeated and pulled a face.

“And after all, the Dragon’s Eye is Emily’s favourite place. It suggests a deep spiritual kinship.”

The First Investigator cleared his throat. The conversation had once again drifted off in a direction that he did not like. “We should go now and visit this work of art.”

Alruna nodded. “Do that. And Jupiter...” She approached him, put her right hand on his shoulder and looked deeply into his eyes. “Please find her!”

## 9. M.L.

There were more or less ten rounded rocks, all of different sizes. The smallest was up to the First Investigator's knees, the largest to his navel. They were roughly arranged in a circle and each was painted colourfully in red, green and blue, with patterns formed by circles and wavy lines. The largest rock in the middle of the circle shone in a rich yellow without any pattern, but moss slowly began to gnaw at it.

The Three Investigators looked at the artwork for a while, Bob read out what was written on the wooden sign: 'The Dragon's Eye—Martha Lake, Rocky Beach'.

"Why an eye?" Pete murmured and walked round the circle of rocks. "I don't see an eye. Only coloured rocks."

"It's art, Pete," Bob replied.

"You think so? I don't know. A primary school class could have done the same thing."

Jupiter cleared his throat. "Fellas, please! We are here to look for Emily."

"Well, she's not here, is she?" Pete quipped.

"And what about tracks?" Bob asked.

Pete let his eyes wander over the grass. "There don't seem to be any."

"And what is this?" Jupiter pointed to a small, shiny object that Pete had overlooked.

Curious, the two of them came closer.

"A hair clip!" Pete picked it up. The hair clip had a small, colourful butterfly design on it.

"Do you remember Emily wearing something like this yesterday?"

Jupiter and Bob shook their heads.

"But it could still be hers," Pete said. "Come on, fellas, let's keep looking, maybe we'll find another clue!"

A short time later, Pete shouted: "Look, a lighter!" He wanted to reach for it.

"Wait, Pete! A metallic silver lighter like this is an ideal item to check for fingerprints."

Jupiter pulled out a handkerchief and picked up the lighter carefully with it. On one side were engraved the letters 'M.L.'

"M.L." mumbled Bob. "Martha Lake?"

"You mean Martha Lake's ghost visited her artwork and lost her lighter?" Pete shook his head. "M.L. can mean anything. It's a pure coincidence if you ask me."

"Still a lead. Keep looking, fellas, maybe we'll find something else!" Juve urged.

The Three Investigators circled the painted rocks several times.

"Here!" cried Bob suddenly. "A cigarette! This is too small to check for fingerprints."

"Yes, you're right," the First Investigator agreed.

Bob picked up the cigarette and inspected it. "A Morley. Looks pretty fresh, so it hasn't been here for long. The tip is burnt, I'd say someone took a maximum of one puff before squeezing it."

Jupiter came closer and took a look at the cigarette. "No, I'd say someone just dropped it. You see, only the paper is slightly charred. A fancy lighter with an engraving and an almost new cigarette... What does it look like to you, fellas?"

"What are you getting at, Juve?" Bob asked.

"What do you think happened here?" Juve asked.

“What else?” Pete said laconically. “Someone with the initials M.L. lit a cigarette, then changed his mind, threw it away and finally lost his lighter.”

But the First Investigator shook his head. “I don’t think so. In my eyes, this is how it happened—the kidnapper ambushed Emily here at her favourite spot. There was a scuffle and M.L. dropped his cigarette and lighter. Emily lost her hair clip.”

Bob frowned. “A person about to kidnap a little girl wouldn’t think about smoking at that moment!”

“He’s right, Jupe,” Pete said.

“I admit my speculations are vague and my theory is not very mature... nevertheless, the clues are growing. Although it has not yet been proven that Emily was indeed kidnapped, we cannot afford to leave the trail untraced.”

“All right,” Bob said. “And how are we gonna do that?”

“Bob, you take the lighter, go back to Headquarters and dust it for fingerprints. Pete and I will visit Mrs Silverstone, give her a progress report and ask her about the hair clip. Then, we’ll meet back at the salvage yard.”

It was already getting dark when Jupiter and Pete arrived exhausted at the salvage yard. Aunt Mathilda had just closed the yard office for the day. The area lay still and deserted in the evening sun. Dust danced in the warm air.

Bob sat in a garden chair in front of the old mobile home trailer that served as The Three Investigators’ headquarters and looked at his friends expectantly. “Well? How was it?”

“Mrs Silverstone is completely worn out,” Pete replied. “Still no sign of Emily. But for that, the police have finally taken action! Mrs Silverstone was able to convince them. The police are now searching for Emily.”

“At least something. What about the hair clip?”

“A direct hit!” Pete said. “It was really Emily’s.”

“What about you, Bob?” Jupiter asked.

“I was able to isolate a fairly distinct fingerprint, the rest was pretty smudged. But what are we supposed to do with it? We don’t even have a suspect yet.”

“Yes,” contradicted Jupiter. “M.L. We just have to find him or her.”

“Easier said than done,” Pete said ironically. “So what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” Jupiter confessed as he sat down on a chair and pinched his lower lip. “The longer I think about it, the more I get the idea that we are just looking at the tip of the iceberg the whole time. I’m pretty sure that Emily’s disappearance is somehow connected to the other strange events of yesterday and today. We’re just missing a few pieces of the puzzle to see the big picture.”

“I can’t wait to see it,” said Pete.

“From now on, we’re leaving the search for Emily to the police. In that regard, we have done our best. Instead, we should be making up for what’s been due all this time.”

“Which is?” Pete wondered.

“Summarize the facts and look for matches,” Jupiter said determinedly. “I mean, what do we have here? A kea attacking a little girl. This kea belongs to a mysterious stranger who apparently trained the bird. The kea is shot down, but both the shooter and the owner are anxious not to be identified. We have an extremely strange woman, if you ask me, who lives in a lonely cabin in a valley and claims to be a fortune-teller.”

“Not true,” Pete contradicted. “She’s a clairvoyant.”



“Whatever... I don’t believe in that kind of thing,” Jupe insisted. “That means she’s either lying to us or good at guessing—or she knows more and is trying to mislead us with her supposed prophecies.”

“Not necessarily,” Bob said. “It could be that she’s leading us in the right direction.”

“That’s possible as well,” Jupiter admitted. “In any case, Alruna is an unknown factor to be studied further. And then we have Dr Wakefield, who, though not at fault, seems to be involved in the story in more ways than one.”

“Oh, yeah?” Pete asked. “I thought he was just Emily’s eye doctor.”

Jupiter continued: “And what about that guy who came by this afternoon and threatened him? Because now it gets interesting. Mr Lake accuses Dr Wakefield of having something to do with his late aunt’s bequest. Martha Lake was Wakefield’s patient... and a friend of Alruna’s... and an artist. Emily is Wakefield’s patient... and a friend of Alruna... and Martha Lake’s artwork is Emily’s favourite place in the forest. Also, Alruna claims that Emily is in some ways very much like Martha. If you ask me, there are a lot of parallels between Martha Lake and Emily Silverstone—too many for a coincidence. And given these parallels, the initials ‘M.L.’ take on a whole new meaning. So let’s focus on Martha Lake! Maybe we can use her to find out what happened to Emily.”

Grabbed by renewed zeal, Jupiter jumped up from his chair and left Headquarters. His friends followed him in amazement as he walked swiftly to the Jones’s house.

Aunt Mathilda was just about to sweep the verandah when Jupe called out to her: “Aunt Mathilda?”

“Oh, you’re just in time, Jupe.” She paused and pressed the broom into Jupiter’s hand. “That’s really your job this week, isn’t it? Your uncle is doing the dishes, I’ll do the cooking. Sweeping is your job today.”

“You’ll be able to eat off the floorboards, Aunt Mathilda, I promise, but first I need some information. Do you know a person by the name of Martha Lake?”

“I’ll tell you when you start sweeping,” Mathilda quipped.

Jupiter rolled his eyes. “Do I have to do this now?”

“I know you very well, Jupiter Jones,” Aunt Mathilda said. “If you don’t do this right now, tomorrow the verandah will still be dirty. And the day after that, it will be the same, if I don’t keep reminding you.”

Jupiter sighed and began to sweep the dust into a corner. Bob and Pete sat down on the wooden stairs and watched him in amusement.

“Martha Lake,” Aunt Mathilda repeated as she leaned against the railing and crossed her arms. “Of course I knew her. She died last year, and she lived not far from here. Why?”

“Do you know any of her relatives?”

“Michael and Sylvia Lake, of course,” Aunt Mathilda said.

“Aha!” Jupe turned to Pete and Bob and remarked quietly: “Michael Lake! That’s M.L.”

“Sylvia is very nice,” Aunt Mathilda continued. “She comes here regularly and rummages through our household items. Her husband Michael was here before, but he is very unpleasant—a crude, stupid lump, if you ask me.”

“Martha was Michael’s aunt.” Aunt Mathilda giggled. “I’m sure he expected to get some inheritance from Martha, but got nothing instead. She didn’t leave a cent to any of her nephews and nieces. That’s just like her—she couldn’t stand her family. She would probably laugh up her sleeve if she could see everyone pulling their hair out and blaming each other for the inheritance debacle.”

“You seem to have known her quite well,” Jupiter marvelled.

“Well, she used to come up here a lot, poking around and chatting with me. She also painted and sold Titus three or four paintings. Strange stuff... I don’t think we managed to resell the paintings. They’re probably in the storeroom in the back corner somewhere. Her painting was probably also the reason why Martha never dreamed of bequeathing anything to her money-hungry relatives. She felt that her family did not take her seriously as an artist. And she didn’t want to leave a bequest to people who didn’t understand her paintings, or even look at them properly. ‘Conservative, narrow-minded idiots,’ she called them.”

Aunt Mathilda was smiling inside. “But there would have been something to inherit, if I understand it correctly. I believe she had quite a large jewellery collection. She has travelled a lot and has been around the world, and she brought back something from everywhere. We never really talked about money. But I think she was pretty well off, or Michael wouldn’t have been so freaked out. Sylvia talked about it once.”

“And who inherited this jewellery in the end?” Jupe asked.

“Nobody. They disappeared. Sylvia said her husband searched the whole house and found nothing. They even say that Martha hid the jewellery in the woods somewhere so it wouldn’t fall into the hands of her greedy family.” Aunt Mathilda laughed. “But the story is really too absurd! Hidden in the forest! Who would do such a thing! On the other hand... if anyone would do this, it’s Martha Lake! As crazy as it sounds, it would have suited her. But I don’t know the whole story that well either. You’ll have to ask Sylvia.”

“Do you know where she lives?” Jupe asked.

“At the corner of Main Street and Canyon Drive.”

“Thank you, Aunt Mathilda, you’re wonderful!”

At once Jupiter dropped the broom and jumped down the stairs.

“Hey! What about the sweeping?”

“It’s almost clean!”

“But not quite yet!”

“Later, Aunt Mathilda, I promise!” Jupiter said. “Come on, fellas, we’ve got another lead!”

Bob and Pete hurried to follow the First Investigator.

“Hey, Jupe!” Pete called out. “What are you up to? Are we going to the Lakes?”

“You guessed it, Pete.”

When The Three Investigators were walking towards Main Street, Pete asked: “How did you know your aunt knew Martha Lake?”

“It’s simple. Aunt Mathilda practically knows everybody in Rocky Beach. I should have thought of asking her sooner.”

Main Street was not far away. Ten minutes later, they were standing at the corner in front of a family home. There was a light on behind the windows. Jupiter looked at the name on the mailbox. It said: ‘Sylvia & Michael Lake’.

“This could be the M.L. we are looking for,” Jupiter remarked. Then he walked towards the door and rang the bell.

A moment later, a man opened the door. He was very tall and huge. His black hair had been combed back straight. Under his bushy eyebrows flashed small, dark eyes, with which he looked at The Three Investigators.

“Who are you? And what do you want?” he asked with a booming bass voice.

Jupiter flinched. The voice was unmistakable. Bob and Pete had also recognized it immediately. This was the man at Dr Wakefield’s house earlier in the afternoon!



## 10. Trapped!

Jupiter cleared his throat. No need to panic! After all, they knew Martha Lake's nephew lived here.

"Sorry to disturb you. Are you Michael Lake?" Jupiter asked.

"That's me," said the man.

"My name is Jupiter Jones. I am the nephew of Titus and Mathilda Jones from The Jones Salvage Yard here in Rocky Beach. These are my friends Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw. We are detectives, investigating on behalf of Mrs Silverstone. Do you happen to know her?"

"No. Never heard of her. Detectives? Are you kidding me? I don't have time for kid games." Mr Lake was about to slam the door, but Jupiter was not prepared to be turned away so quickly.

"Mrs Silverstone has a little daughter who may have been kidnapped," he said quickly. "You may be able to help us find her."

"What?" Mr Lake remarked. "What's that got to do with me? I don't even know her."

"Would you please let us in, sir? Then we can tell you the whole story."

"Why should I?" growled Lake. "Get out!"

"In some way your aunt seems to be involved in this!" Jupiter said quickly.

Michael Lake paused. "Aunt Martha?"

"Quite so."

"How so?"

"There seems to be a connection between Martha Lake and Emily Silverstone," Jupiter said.

Lake looked at him in amazement for a moment. But then he laughed dryly. "Forget it, boys. My aunt's been dead for more than a year. How could she be involved in a kidnap?"

"Not directly, of course," Jupiter replied. "But she does exert a certain amount of influence."

"Nonsense!" Again, Mr Lake tried to close the door.

Jupiter had to think of something! "Just about as much as she has influence over you and Dr Wakefield."

Michael Lake ripped the door open again. He stared at Jupiter angrily. "What are you saying?"

"You had quite a heated argument with Dr Tiberius Wakefield today... over some inheritance from your aunt. You threatened him, and in a very violent way. If you don't want to talk about Emily Silverstone's disappearance, how about Dr Wakefield as the topic of conversation?"

The Three Investigators could literally watch the man turn red. He was shaking with rage. "You rascals! So Wakefield sent you! That absurd story about the kidnapped girl was just an excuse to get to me!"

"Forgive me, sir, but you are mistaken. We—" Jupiter began.

"Get out of here!" yelled Lake. "And tell Wakefield to mind his own business!" With a bang, the door slammed shut.

For seconds, The Three Investigators were speechless.

"Wow," Pete finally said. "He is really mad."

"We'd better go, Jupe," Bob suggested. "Otherwise he'll come out with a shotgun."

The First Investigator nodded and they retreated to the street in the shade of a tree.

"What a washout," Bob thought. "Say, why did you suddenly ask Lake about Dr Wakefield? Was that your plan?"

Jupiter raised his shoulders helplessly. "What else could I do? He would have slammed the door in our faces. Somehow I had to get his attention."

"You definitely succeeded," Pete said. "But he still slammed the door in our faces."

"Anyway, we still got something out of it," Jupe said.

"What?" Pete asked.

"Notice when I mentioned Wakefield, he's completely lost it!" Jupe replied. "Don't you find that interesting?"

"No," Pete confessed. "Because I don't see how this is going to help us find Emily."

"At least now we know that Michael Lake has nothing to do with Emily," Bob remarked. "He doesn't even know her. And I don't think he was kidding. He doesn't seem like a very good actor."

Jupiter frowned. "I think that conclusion is a bit premature, Bob. After all, we still have a lighter with the initials 'M.L.' found at the possible crime scene. I would have loved the opportunity to compare the fingerprint with Michael Lake's. But when he dumps us like this —"

Suddenly, Jupe fell silent and listened. Excited voices came out of the house. He turned around. "Shh! Do you hear that? It's Lake!"

"And another man," Pete added. "I thought he was alone."

"Apparently, he's not." Jupiter was suddenly electrified. "Come on, fellas, let's listen to them up close!"

"Are you crazy?" hissed Pete. "What if Bob's right and Lake really has a shotgun?"

"So what? Besides, Michael Lake is very busy right now, as you can hear!" Jupiter ducked and headed back to the Lake house. Bob and Pete were forced to follow him.

Under cover of darkness, The Three Investigators crept through the front garden. Here the roar could be heard very clearly. They circled the house a quarter of the way around until they were standing under a half-open window. There they pressed themselves tightly against the wall and listened.

"I really don't understand why you're so upset!" That was Michael's voice. "You said yourself, Wakefield is still in our way."

"You understand nothing, Michael." The other man's voice was shrill, almost hysterical. "Threatening Wakefield was the stupidest thing you could do!"

"Why? He is the culprit!" Michael growled. "Again and again he lurks around in front of our house! And I'm sure he knows something about Martha he never told us. But I think I scared him off pretty good this time."

"Exactly! Don't you realize that this makes us suspects?"

"Suspects?" Michael countered. "What kind of suspicion?"

"Well, in case... in case anything happens!"

"What is supposed to happen?" Michael asked. "What are you talking about?"

"I... You can't do this on your own, okay? You're gonna get us in a lot of trouble!"

"Roar a little softer, will you?" Michael urged. "The neighbours will hear every word!"

Suddenly, steps approached the window. The Three Investigators crouched down as low as possible. A large hand appeared above them, closing the window with a jerk. From now on, only incomprehensible murmurs could be heard.

“Bummer!” Jupiter cursed softly and looked around. Then he scurried on, crouching.

“Where are you going?” Pete whispered.

“Find another window!” The First Investigator was unstoppable. As fast as he could, he went around the house until he found a window at the back that was wide open. Everything behind it was dark.

Jupiter risked a look. It was a bedroom. The door was closed. Jupiter looked around. The Lakes’ garden was separated from the neighbouring properties by a high hedge. So he was safe from prying eyes. Determined, he placed both hands on the window sill.

“Give me a hand,” he whispered to Pete.

“You... you’re not thinking of getting into the house, are you?” whispered the horrified Second Investigator.

“We have absolutely no time for discussion, Pete! Come on, help me!” Jupe insisted.

“I...” Pete stammered.

“Then you help me, Bob,” Jupe said, as he did not want to waste any more time convincing Pete.

Bob also hesitated for a moment, but then he folded his hands to a robber ladder and helped Jupiter climb through the window.

“And what do we do?” whispered Bob, after the First Investigator had landed safely on the other side.

“Be on the watch out for me in case something goes wrong!” Jupiter turned around, crossed the bedroom and listened at the door. The muffled voices still could not be heard. Jupiter held his breath and turned the knob. The door swung open silently. A dark corridor lay before him. The voices came from the left.

Jupiter looked around, then followed the corridor to another door made of ribbed glass. Behind it was possibly the living room. He could clearly see two human figures walking restlessly up and down. One was clearly Michael Lake. The other was smaller and thinner, but his voice was much sharper. Now Jupiter finally could hear what was spoken.

“I still can’t believe it,” the smaller man said. “If those three boys hadn’t shown up all of a sudden, I don’t think I would have known about your antics, Michael!”

“And I can’t shake the feeling that you’re hiding something from me,” Michael said. “It was no accident that those guys showed up at my door... Emily Silverstone—who is she?”

“How should I know?” cried the smaller man angrily. “I have no idea what the boys were talking about!”

“Are you sure?” Michael asked.

“What do you mean?”

“This cannot be happening!” Michael Lake placed a glass on a table and crossed his arms. “I don’t believe it! We’ve been trying to find Aunt Martha’s jewellery for a year!”

“We?” the smaller man burst out. “I don’t even have a clue where you’re looking!”

“If you want Martha’s jewels, you have to trust me,” Michael said. “Now if you’ll excuse me. I have work to do.”

The voices became quieter. The two men had left the living room and out the front door.

It’s now or never! Jupiter opened the glass door and scampered into the living room. Then he heard the two men talking outside the front door. Jupiter would only need a few seconds. It was completely safe. He crept to the table and grabbed the glass that Michael Lake had left there.

It was still half full. He looked around indecisively and finally tipped the golden yellow contents into a flower pot. Then he scurried back to the glass door—and froze in fright!

In front of him stood a huge St Bernard—probably the biggest dog Jupiter had ever seen. He looked at the First Investigator with drippy eyes and blocked his way out. His massive body filled the passage so completely that it was impossible to squeeze past him. Jupiter was counting on a deafening bark. But the St Bernard did not even growl. Questioningly, he looked up at Jupiter.

Jupiter's heart was racing. Feverishly he searched for a way out. There was none. And already he heard the front door close and steps approaching. Michael Lake was coming back!

Jupiter was trapped! He only had seconds left. He feverishly searched for a place to hide.

The armchair in the corner! The First Investigator dashed towards it and ducked behind the high backrest. Not a moment too soon, because Lake already entered the living room. Jupiter held his breath.

The St Bernard still looked blankly at Juve. His mouth was half open and a disgusting thread of saliva dripped down in slow motion. Jupiter forced himself to look away. He peered around the back of the chair. Lake stood with his back to him. He had just realized that his drink had disappeared.

"What?" he muttered, took a new glass and poured himself another drink from a bottle. He turned around and walked straight to the armchair. The First Investigator flinched and made himself as small as possible.

Michael Lake let himself fall into the armchair, which creaked alarmingly under his weight. For a moment, Jupiter feared the armchair would collapse on him. He broke out in a sweat. Lake was sitting less than twenty centimetres away from him! He hadn't discovered him yet.

But Jupiter could not sit here forever! At some point, he would cough or sneeze or simply breathe loudly and then... he did not pursue the thought any further.

Lake sipped his drink. The St Bernard still stared bluntly in Jupiter's direction, but Lake took no notice. Jupiter's foot began to tingle as the minutes passed dreadfully slowly. The tingling became unbearable, but he didn't dare to move, because the slightest noise would...

Suddenly, Michael Lake got up! Jupiter found hope. If he left the room now...

Unfortunately, he returned with a new drink and let himself fall back into the armchair. Jupiter collapsed inside. This could go on all evening! His foot was numb by now. His T-shirt wet with sweat. His heartbeat must have been heard three blocks away!

Suddenly, there was a movement! Drooling Mouth, the gigantic monster of a dog, trotted towards Jupiter. Jupiter's heartbeat stopped. He tried to scare the St Bernard away with a waving gesture, but Drooling Mouth only seemed to get more interested. He came closer. Finally, his gigantic head was only centimetres away from Juve. He sniffed at Jupiter's hair. Jupiter tried to push him away, but it was hopeless.

The St Bernard opened his mouth. His warm, moist breath punched Jupiter in the face. Then the dog let his hand-sized baggy tongue hang out.

"No!" Jupiter thought to himself. "No, you won't do it!" In a flash, he lifted the glass and held it under the drooling mouth. The dog wrinkled his nose, sneezed into the glass and took a step back.

"What are you doing, James! Did you find something to eat?" Michael Lake moved in his armchair.

He's gonna turn around! He's gonna get up and look behind the chair! Jupiter's body was tense. The element of surprise was on his side, but his foot had fallen asleep and that put a damper on his plans. He couldn't even stand up, let alone walk. He closed his eyes in despair.

Rrrriiing!

## 11. Emily's Dragon

Jupiter flinched. It was the door bell!

Michael Lake rose cursing, put down the glass on the table and left the living room. James trotted after him. At once Jupiter rushed out of his hiding place, hobbled to the table, exchanged the drooled glass for the fresh one and left the living room through the glass door.

In no time, he was back in the bedroom and climbed out the window. Bob and Pete were not there. He dropped himself on the lawn, picked himself up and ran back to the street. He could barely hear Michael Lake angrily slammed the door.

Bob and Pete were waiting for him in the shade of the tree. "Gee, Jupe!" cried the Second Investigator. "Thank goodness! Where have you been?"

"I... found myself in a somewhat awkward position," Jupiter confessed.

"We thought so," Bob said. "That's why Pete rang the door bell. We thought it might give you an advantage in case you got trapped."

"An excellent timing, fellas! Thank you very much," Jupiter sighed. Only now did the tension slowly ease away from him.

"Was it worth the excitement?" Pete asked.

"Here it is," Jupiter held up the stolen glass. "I present to you the fingerprints of Michael Lake. Come on, fellas, let's go back to Headquarters and make a comparison. I can't wait to see the results."

A quarter of an hour later, The Three Investigators were sitting in their cramped, dark crime lab, which was located at the back of Headquarters. Here they had the opportunity to develop photos or make secret codes visible. On the shelves were dozens of chemicals and all kinds of equipment that Jupiter had found and repaired or completely transformed over time at the salvage yard.

Now they bent over the white laboratory table and watched as Bob carefully applied the fingerprint powder and little by little the traces became visible. He succeeded in isolating two very distinct prints.

"This one should be the right index finger," he said. From a drawer, he took a white cardboard card on which he had fixed the fingerprint from the lighter. "And we have the right index finger here too."

He compared the two tracks with a magnifying glass—and lifted his head in disappointment after only a few seconds. "Nothing. I'm no expert, but you don't have to be one to see at first glance that the prints are not identical."

"Let me see!" Pete took the magnifying glass out of his hand, but he should soon agree with Bob. "Whoever M.L. is, it sure isn't Michael Lake."

For a while, nobody said a word. "I confess, I expected a little more," Jupiter finally admitted.

"Does this mean we're on the wrong track after all?" Pete asked. "Perhaps Michael Lake had absolutely nothing to do with Emily's disappearance?"

"I don't know." Jupiter rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Actually, I was so sure there was some connection. But now—"



The phone rang. Jupiter looked at his watch. It was already 8:30 pm. He went to the phone, turned on the loudspeaker and answered the call. "The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Jupiter? This is Mrs Silverstone. I'm so glad I caught you." She sounded very excited.

The First Investigator was alarmed. "Did something happen?"

"Indeed. You must come at once!"

It was dark. Only the white lights of the street lamps illuminated the deserted streets of Rocky Beach. A cool breeze was blowing after the hot day, but Bob felt the heat stored by the asphalt under his feet as he cycled through the lonely settlements towards the outskirts of town. Jupiter and Pete were in front of him. No one spoke a word, but Bob could literally hear the thoughts of his friends.

No one could get Mrs Silverstone's agitated voice out of their head. 'You must come at once!'—it could only mean one thing—the worst. Bob scared the thought away and pedalled a little faster. The sooner they got to Mrs Silverstone's house, the sooner they'd know for sure.

Finally, they reached the last house on the road by the forest. There was a light behind the windows. They locked the bikes, went to the front door and rang the bell.

Mrs Silverstone opened the door a moment later. Her face was red, her eyes were moist and shiny. Her expression was hard to read. She was upset, that's for sure, but no one could say exactly what had happened.

"Come in," she just said, stepping aside and closing the door behind them. Then she went ahead into the living room and hurried to the sofa to sit down again as quickly as possible. Next to her, sitting huddled up and looking at The Three Investigators with big, crying eyes was Emily.

"Emily!" cried Bob. "You're back!"

She nodded silently and moved closer to her mother, who held her as if she were clinging to her own life. Again and again, she stroked her hair. For a moment, The Three Investigators stared at the mother and daughter speechlessly.

"Kraaah!" The strange cawing drew their attention to the back corner of the room. There, on the edge of a bookshelf, crouched an olive-green bird that had a kind of splint on its right wing. It watched them attentively from its dark eyes, and then it plucked a few pieces of paper from a book. The yellow dust jacket was already scattered in shreds.

"The kea!" Jupiter cried and looked back at Emily, then back to the bird, and finally to Mrs Silverstone. "Forgive me, Mrs Silverstone. Even though I am accustomed to strange situations, I am a little overwhelmed at the moment. When did Emily come back? Where was she? And what is the *Nestor notabilis* doing here?"

"The who?" Mrs Silverstone asked.

"*Nestor notabilis*. That bird there."

"Please sit down first," Mrs Silverstone said.

When The Three Investigators had taken their seats, she began to talk without taking both her hands off her daughter. "Emily came back an hour ago. She suddenly appeared at the door, crying with this bird on her shoulder."

"It's a dragon," Emily softly insisted. "Birds can't save people. Dragons can. So it must be a dragon."

"Save?" Pete asked in astonishment.

“Emily was kidnapped,” said Mrs Silverstone. She broke into tears and pressed Emily even harder. As a result, Emily began to cry too. So mother and daughter sobbed for a while pressed close together and The Three Investigators did not know how to react.

“Mrs Silverstone,” Jupiter finally said emphatically. “We’re all very relieved that Emily has returned home safely, but that doesn’t mean that you are out of danger. The kidnapper is still on the loose, isn’t he?”

Mrs Silverstone nodded her head.

“Emily, do you know who kidnapped you?” Jupiter asked.

The girl shook her head and sniffed. “It’s a man.”

“Where did he take you?”

“To a house.”

“Do you know where this house is?”

She shook her head.

“Is it far?”

Another shake of the head.

“Mrs Silverstone, have you called the police yet?”

“No. I... I wanted to wait for you first. The police... they’re gonna question Emily, aren’t they? They’re gonna ask her a thousand questions. They’re gonna scare her. She’s just a child!”

Jupiter sighed heavily. “I see what you mean. Eventually, you will have to talk to the police. Kidnapping is way out of our league, I’m afraid. I don’t want to take any chances on this.”

Pete got up, went to the sofa and sat down next to Emily. “Emily, how are you feeling?”

She looked down at her knees, shrugged her shoulders and remained silent.

“What do you say we get some people to come talk to you right now?” Pete asked.

“I want to stay with Mum,” Emily replied.

“You can do it too, I promise. They’re just gonna ask you a few questions—about what happened today. Do you think you’d like to answer some questions?”

Emily looked at him. “Can I ask you something? ... You’re detectives. Isn’t that something like the police?”

“Well,” smiled Pete. “Well, sort of.”

“I have a suggestion,” Bob said. “We’ll call the police, but we don’t have to let them talk to Emily—provided you tell us everything you know. How about that, Emily?”

Emily nodded.

“So what happened this morning when your mother sent you shopping?” Pete asked.

She threw an uncertain look at her mother. “Don’t be mad, Mum, okay?”

“No, Emily, no, not at all,” Mrs Silverstone said, hugging her again.

“I did not go straight to the supermarket. I went into the woods...” Emily confessed. “I just wanted to run over to the fairy queen and bring her some flowers, since I wasn’t allowed to do that yesterday. I had to run so that it would be quick. And then I passed the Dragon’s Eye. There was a man there.”

“Did he say anything to you?” Pete asked.

“Um... he asked if I go there often,” Emily said. “But I’m not supposed to talk to strangers, so I wanted to leave quickly. And then I—” Suddenly her voice failed and she started to cry again.

“Shh!” Mrs Silverstone did, stroking her head. “It’s all right, my dear. It’s all right.”

It took a few minutes for Emily to calm down again. Then she went on: “Suddenly he grabbed me and yelled at me. But I just cried and kicked... And then he tied me up, took me

and put me in his car. Then he drove to a house. There he tied me to a chair and put something in my mouth so I couldn't scream anymore. After that, he went away and never came back."

Pete was appalled. He could hardly believe what he heard. The Three Investigators had experienced many things in their career as detectives, even such brutal kidnappings... but Emily was only six years old! She must have been scared to death! The Second Investigator felt a hot fury rising inside of him. Whoever that man was, Pete would like to get back at him!

"I know this may sound strange, Emily," Jupiter said, "but we have to pay attention to little things as well. For example, did the man smoke when he spoke to you at the Dragon's Eye?"

"Yes. I remember that because he took out a cigarette. At that moment, I thought I could run away but he came after me."

"And he dropped his cigarette," Jupiter concluded. "And his lighter... Um... Do you know what kind of car he gave you a ride in?"

"A green one," Emily replied.

"A green Renault?"

"What's a Renault?"

"It's okay. It's not that big a deal. But here's something very important, Emily—what did the man look like?"

"That's what Mummy asked me. Like a man."

"Was he tall or short?"

Emily frowned. "Medium, I'd say."

"Fat or thin?"

"Also medium."

"And the colour of his hair?"

"Light brown."

"Did he have a beard?"

"No."

"Glasses?"

"No."

"What clothes were he wearing?"

"Dark clothes."

"Was there anything particularly noticeable about him?"

"He was mean to me."

The First Investigator saw that he couldn't get anywhere like that. Maybe Emily would remember more later. "What did the house he took you to look like?"

"Like a house," Emily said. "It was on a hill. He drove his car very close to the house."

"Was there other people in the house?"

"Not in that house, but there was another big house next to it. There was a sign by the road with some letters in red lights."

"And what did it say?" asked the First Investigator.

"I can't read yet, Jupiter," Emily replied reproachfully.

"I know what the sign said!" Bob called out suddenly. "A big house by the road, a small house on a hill, letters in red lights—that's a red neon sign, so it has to be a motel!"

Jupiter was thrilled. "Yeah, right, Bob, that must be it!"

"There aren't that many motels around here," Pete said. "It can only be the Moss Motel on the northern outskirts of town! The description fits!"

“We’ll call the police,” Jupiter decided. “Maybe the kidnapper is still there. Emily, tell us quickly how you escaped.”

“There was this dragon...” She pointed to the kea, which was still sitting on the bookshelf. He had knocked over one of the books. Now he turned the pages with his beak, page by page. It almost looked as if he was reading it. The difference was that he took pleasure in tearing each page down into tiny pieces.

“He was sitting on a pole,” Emily continued. “At first I was afraid of him... But I think he was afraid too. He is hurt. And I think he is sorry he attacked me yesterday. We are friends now. At some point, he climbed off the pole and hopped on me. It took a long time, but in the end I got him to break the ropes around my arms. His beak is really sharp. And then we ran off together.”

The Three Investigators looked at each other in bewilderment. This story was completely crazy, but coming from Emily, in a way, it was completely believable.

“Then how did you find your way home?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know. I just ran. And then, at some point, I came to a road I knew.”

“Have you been running long?”

She shook her head.

“Then it must be the Moss Motel,” Bob was convinced.

The First Investigator rose. “With your permission, Mrs Silverstone, I will now call the police and have them go to the motel. We will meet them there. Then we can explain the situation to the officers. You and Emily can stay here for the time being.”

“That’s a very good idea, Jupiter,” said Mrs Silverstone with relief. “Thank you so much for helping us!”

Jupiter went to the phone and called the Rocky Beach Police Department.

“We have to be at the motel in five minutes,” he said when he got back. “Let’s go, fellas!”

The Three Investigators were already on their way out, when the First Investigator thought of something else. “Emily, one last question—do you have any idea what that man wanted from you? Did he say or do anything?”

Emily shook her head. “Only at the Dragon’s Eye. He asked me the same question over and over again, but I didn’t know what he meant.”

“What did he ask you?”

““What do you see?’ He asked me again and again... ‘What do you see?’ And he pointed at the rocks.”

## 12. Ambush!

By the time The Three Investigators reached the Moss Motel, they saw several police officers standing in front of the long, somewhat shabby building, where one could rent a room for a night for little money. The red-blue lights of the patrol cars scurried across the dusty ground, bathing the area in eerie light. At the top of the hill, more policemen stood in front of the small house Emily had described. They were talking with a small man with sparse grey hair.

The Three Investigators walked towards the small house. Immediately a policeman stood in their way. "I'm sorry, boys, but you're not allowed on the premises at this time—unless you live here."

Jupiter shook his head. "Actually I called and informed you of the kidnapping of Emily Silverstone."

The policeman raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You called us? Well, you'd better get in touch with the inspector. He'll have some questions for you."

He let them pass and shortly afterwards they stood in front of the small house. Bob recognized the grey-haired man as Arthur Moss, the motel owner. He was still talking to the policemen.

One of the policemen sensed someone approaching him from behind and he turned around angrily. "I told you specifically that no one is to be admitted..."

"Inspector Kershaw!" Jupiter said in a velvety voice. "A very good evening to you. If I'm correct in my assessment of the current situation, you did not catch the kidnapper."

"What are you doing here?" the inspector asked.

"Your colleague at police department asked us to meet you here."

"Are you telling me you're behind this again?"

"Exactly. But before you jump to conclusions, allow me to clarify the situation." Jupiter didn't wait for Kershaw's answer, but went right ahead and summarized what had happened and why neither Mrs Silverstone nor Emily were there in person.

To Jupiter's astonishment, Kershaw's indignation was limited. Although he was still far from smiling, he seemed to realize that he had no choice in this case but to work with The Three Investigators.

"All right," Kershaw finally said in a tone of extreme objectivity. "The alleged kidnapper, a Mr Daniel Jackson, has left. He packed up all his things, and he escaped."

"Without paying for the room," Mr Moss exclaimed in the background.

"He probably came back, saw that Emily had disappeared, put one and one together and guessed that the police would arrive at any moment," Jupiter said.

"We'll put out an APB," Inspector Kershaw decided. "It is likely, however, that the kidnapper has registered under a false name. Mr Moss, may I ask you to come down to the station with me and record your statements? We'll also do a sketch based on your description. I'll accept Mrs Silverstone's request and I won't see her until tomorrow morning... And you three..." He turned to The Three Investigators and his face became icy. "From now on you will stay out of this matter! And completely! You can mess around with Cotta but not with me!"

“Have a nice evening, Inspector,” Jupiter replied and The Three Investigators left the motel premises.

“What a day!” Pete moaned as they cycled leisurely home. “I’m exhausted! Anything else, Jupe? Please say no, I want to go to bed!”

“There’s still a lot of work to be done, come to think of it.” Jupe said.

“Why?” asked the Second Investigator. “Well, I think we did our job. Mission number one was to find the dragon. We did—he sits on a shelf at Mrs Silverstone’s house and eats books. Mission number two was to find Emily, and it was also done. Why don’t we just leave the kidnapper to the police and enjoy a relaxing weekend on the beach?”

“And what about all those unanswered questions? Emily’s kidnapping, the kea, and last but not least, this whole shady story around Martha Lake. These are still unsolved mysteries. This will surely keep me away from a relaxing weekend, if that’s what you call it. I confess, however, that I have no other course of action in mind that can be effectively carried out tonight.”

“Sheesh! Jupe, what if I could speak as pompous as you are for once!” Pete quipped.

“Not just you, Pete. Those around you would also appreciate a more exclusive art of expression on your part.”

A short time later, after Pete and Bob went off on their separate ways, Jupiter cycled into the street where the salvage yard was located. There were still too many puzzles haunting him. And if he couldn’t answer at least a few more questions tonight, he probably wouldn’t get any sleep at all.

The main gate of the salvage yard was already closed, but there was a particular point along the wooden fence of the yard where there was a secret entrance known only to The Three Investigators. Called Red Gate Rover, they set it up many years ago for them to enter and exit the salvage yard unseen.

Jupe cycled along the wooden fence of the salvage yard, turned a corner and stopped next to Red Gate Rover. He just got off his bike when suddenly, he sensed someone or something coming up behind him. He wanted to turn around, but it was too late.

With a crunch and a loud breathing, Jupiter was suddenly grabbed from behind and pulled back. Someone pressed a hand over his mouth and a moment later, he felt the icy cold steel of a gun muzzle at his throat. A rough voice hissed close to his ear: “Don’t move or you’re dead!”

Jupiter’s heart was pounding up to his neck, and adrenaline flooded through his body. “I…” he mumbled, but that was as far as he got.

“And don’t you dare scream!”

“Okay!” Jupiter gasped and tried to take a deep breath. But the unknown man made no attempt to loosen his grip or the pressure of the gun. Jupiter turned his head as far as he could, but he only managed to catch a glimpse of the attacker. He was wearing a full-face ski mask, and his voice was muffled.

“Listen, fatso!” hissed the stranger and Jupiter felt the warm breath on his ear. “Don’t stick your nose into things that don’t concern you!”

“I… I don’t know what you mean,” Jupiter stammered.

“You heard me perfectly!” the stranger continued. “Hands off Martha Lake and her jewellery! If you ever show up at her family’s house again—or at Dr Wakefield’s—you’re finished! And you leave Emily Silverstone alone too! Do you understand me?”

The stranger did not wait for the answer, but immediately increased the pressure of the gun. "Do you understand me, fat boy?"

"Yes!" gasped Jupiter. "Yes! I understand!"

"I hope so—for your sake. I know all about you, Jupiter Jones. And if I catch you near the Lakes or the Silverstones again, you'll regret it. I'll let you go this time... Don't move! Don't you turn around! And don't get in my way again!"

Suddenly, before Jupiter could reply, the attacker let go of him. The First Investigator did not dare to move. He heard steps go across the street. Finally, it was silent again.

Jupiter took a deep breath and carefully touched his neck. He was not harmed. He turned around. The assailant had disappeared.

Suddenly, the First Investigator started shaking. His legs felt like pudding and he sat down on the pavement. For a few minutes, he just gave in to fear, he felt hot and cold at the same time and he toyed with the idea of calling the police. But then he called himself to order inside. What could the police do? The stranger had disappeared without a trace. And if Inspector Kershaw got wind of the matter, they would have one more enemy. No, there is no point in contacting the police. The Three Investigators had to handle the case alone.

Jupiter took the assailant's warning seriously, but he still wasn't planning on being intimidated. He was so determined to solve the mystery that he wouldn't allow that stranger's warning to stop him. Slowly, he stood back up.

Covering the whole back fence of the yard was a painting of the San Francisco fire of 1906—a dramatic scene of burning buildings, horse-drawn fire engines dashing into action, and people fleeing with bundles on their backs. In the corner of the painting, there was a little dog sitting there looking at the fire. This was Rover, and one of his eyes was a knot.

Jupe looked around to make sure that nobody was looking. Then he carefully pulled out the knot and reached in to release a catch. A few boards swung up and Jupiter pushed his bike through the opening.

After Jupiter had closed the boards back and stood safely inside the dark and quiet salvage yard, he felt totally exhausted by the events of the day. But at the same time, he knew that he would only toss and turn in bed. So after a short hesitation, he turned to Headquarters, removed the padlock and entered the trailer.

Here it was warm and stuffy. The heat of the day had turned Headquarters into a sauna. Jupiter opened all the windows and also left the door open. The cool night air slowly made it more bearable. He sat down at the desk, but left the light off and stared into the darkness.

Emily... Martha Lake... Her jewellery... A work of art in the forest... A trained kea... A mysterious shooter... Martha's nephew... An eye doctor... A birdman... A clairvoyant... And only a moment ago, an assailant... Somehow Jupiter believed so strongly that all these things were connected. Although he already had so many pieces of the puzzle—the connection was missing. At the moment, he could not see the big picture.

Frustrated, he drank a sip of cola, switched on the TV and zapped through the programmes—a news bulletin... an action movie... music videos... more music videos... Jupiter stayed on that channel without paying much attention to it. Then something caught his ear—a singer sang: "I want to see the world through your eyes..."

Yes, that's right—'see the world through your eyes...' Jupiter couldn't get rid of the feeling that this was exactly the point. If he wasn't First Investigator Jupiter Jones but someone else, then he could see through the eyes of another person, and perhaps he might be able to find the solution to the mystery long ago. It seemed to him as if it was right in front of him—veiled, hidden, or invisible in a certain way.

Jupiter reached for the remote control and turned off the TV. It was quiet again, except for crickets chirping, and in the distance, a motorbike rattled along the coastal road.

Suddenly, the phone rang. It tore Jupiter from his thoughts. A phone call in the middle of the night rarely meant anything good. He quickly picked up the phone. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

“Ha, I knew you haven’t gone to bed yet,” Bob said. “Listen, I just remembered something.”

“What?”

“Your aunt mentioned that Uncle Titus once bought paintings of Martha Lake that he never resold. I thought maybe...”

“Gee, Bob! I forgot all about the paintings!” Jupe exclaimed. “Of course! Thanks for the tip. I’ll look for them in the storeroom right away.”

“Okay. I am very curious as well, but I’m very tired. I’m going to sleep now,” Bob said. “See you tomorrow.”

The First Investigator hung up, reached into the desk drawer for a flashlight and went outside. He hurried across the salvage yard to the storeroom where his uncle kept weather-sensitive or valuable things, including paintings. The key was in the gutter.

Jupiter opened the door and switched on the light and saw a whole host of dusty furniture, plaster sculptures and paintings. Martha Lake’s paintings were the last in a whole series of oil paintings that Uncle Titus never resold. Although Jupiter didn’t know exactly what to look for, he recognized them right away. A glance at the signature confirmed his suspicion.

There were four paintings, all about one metre square. With difficulty, the First Investigator took the paintings outside and leaned them against the wall of the storeroom where the moonlight fell. He took a few steps back, sat on the ground and looked at them.

Were there clues in the paintings? Slowly but surely, the feeling crept into him that he was very close to solving the mystery. He looked closely at the paintings, one after another, and suddenly the realization hit him like a knockout punch.

He was right—he had been blind to the solution of the mystery. But now it lay as bright and clear before him.



### 13. A Little Experiment

“I don’t know...” Pete mumbled and trod restlessly from one foot to the other. “We should put the paintings away as soon as possible. What if that guy is watching us?”

“Then what?” Jupiter asked.

“Well... what if he wants these paintings?” Pete said. “Anyway, he warned you to keep your hands off this matter—and held a gun to your throat! Aren’t you afraid at all?”

Jupiter shook his head. “He will hardly attack us in broad daylight. And from where should he watch us? I think we’re relatively safe from him at the moment.”

It was early Sunday morning. Jupiter had called Bob and Pete urgently for a meeting. Both had immediately set off for the salvage yard, albeit still very sleepy. But their tiredness had suddenly vanished when they learned what the First Investigator had experienced the previous night.

“I still don’t know who the assailant was from last night,” Jupe said. “But one thing is clear—he knew a lot more about the case than we did... Anyway, after your call, Bob, I got Martha Lake’s paintings out and I realized that they are a vital key to solving the mystery.” He pointed to the four paintings. “In the words of Emily’s kidnapper: ‘What do you see?’”

“Well,” Bob said, wandering slowly from one painting to another, not that it made any difference.

The four paintings were so similar to each other. If someone had switched the order of the paintings, Bob probably wouldn’t have even noticed. The paintings were yellow, with blurred areas of colour flowing into each other, and barely noticeable shades. Here and there were more distinct brush strokes, but all in all, it was yellow on yellow. There was texture, but it was difficult to make out any patterns, shapes or figures.

“I would say...” Bob finally went on, “I see... well... yellow.”

Pete laughed. “Yes, that’s a very accurate description—yellow—and nothing else.”

Jupiter nodded contentedly. “That’s exactly how I see it.”

“Great, Jupe,” Pete said sarcastically. “And that’s all to it? Wow! I’m impressed! Yellow paintings. That’s... great... I’m speechless... Where does that leave us now?”

“I have a rather daring hunch,” Jupe said. “I admit it sounds outrageous at first, but if it’s true, it’ll all make sense!”

“What kind of hunch?” Pete asked.

Jupiter was silent.

“Come on, Jupe, spit it out, what’s buzzing through your sick mind?” Pete urged.

“I’ll tell you when she’s here.”

“Who?”

“Emily.”

Pete opened his eyes wide. “Emily? Is she coming here?”

Jupiter nodded. “I’ve called Mrs Silverstone and asked her to come and visit us with Emily.”

“Have you gone completely mad?” cried Pete. “Jupe! That guy threatened you with a gun yesterday! He told you to leave Emily alone.”

“So what?”

“So what?” Pete exclaimed. “The man is dangerous, Jupe!”

“I shall not be intimidated, Pete. Besides, we’re incredibly close to the solution of this mystery! We cannot give up now!”

“You’ve got some nerve,” grumbled Pete. “What do you want with Emily anyway? Why do you want her to come here?”

“I want to conduct a little experiment with her.”

“What kind of experiment?”

Jupiter smiled. “You’ll see.”

While they waited for Mrs Silverstone and Emily, Pete looked at the paintings closely again. “Alruna seems to be right about one thing, by the way—Martha Lake and Emily are really very similar. Do you remember the painting that Emily gave me? That was also totally yellow. And there were more of them hanging in her room.”

Jupiter smiled. “If you only knew how close you were to the answer, Pete.”

“Huh? Close? How come—”

Suddenly a black shadow rushed up towards Bob who retracted his head at the last second. The shadow flew over him and landed on one of the painted canvases.

“The kea!” cried Bob. “How did he get here?”

“And how come he can fly again?” Pete asked.

The bird folded his wings and smoothed his feathers with his sharp beak. The right wing was still splinted.

“That is an ultra-light special splint, Pete,” explained Jupiter. “Wild birds are treated with it so that they can fly again immediately despite a broken wing. This is so that they do not have to recover in captivity. As for your question, Bob...”

“Nestor!”

The Three Investigators turned around. Mrs Silverstone and Emily came through the salvage yard gates. Emily ran to the bird who was still perched on one of Martha Lake’s paintings. “Nestor, you naughty boy! I told you not to fly away!”

“Hello, Emily!” Pete said and smiled. “Nestor?”

“Yes, that’s his name now,” Emily said. “Mum let me keep him. And he needs a name, right? Come on, Nestor!”

Emily stretched out her arm and the kea fluttered to her, climbing up her arm on her shoulder and making himself comfortable.

“But you got him used to you very quickly,” Jupiter said appreciatively.

Emily stretched proudly. “Well, he’s my friend!”

Now Mrs Silverstone came towards them. “Good morning, you three!”

“Good morning!” said Jupiter. “How are you?”

She sighed. “Much better, thank you. I was afraid for Emily at first, that she would have nightmares or something, but she slept very well. This bird is a little miracle. He’s so trusting, and he makes Emily forget all the terrible things that happened to her.”

“We’re glad to hear it,” Jupiter said.

“Forgive me, Jupiter, but we don’t have much time,” Mrs Silverstone said. “Inspector Kershaw will be at our place in an hour to take Emily’s statement. We must be back by then.”

“I understand.” Jupiter turned to the little girl. “Emily, we need your help. It may seem strange to you, but... well... maybe you can just answer one question for us.”

He pointed to Martha Lake’s four paintings. “Take a look at these paintings. Can you describe what you see in them?”

Emily took a look at canvases. “What exactly do you mean by that?”

Jupiter gave her a doubtful look. “Nothing in particular. Just tell me what you see in the paintings.”

“All right. So, on the first one, I see a vase of colourful flowers and a bowl of fruits. On the second is a woman. On the third is a house with a horse in front of it. And the fourth is a bridge with a woman. She’s walking across it.”

Bob and Pete stared stunned at Emily but Jupiter grinned triumphantly.

Mrs Silverstone shook her head slowly. “Oh, Emily! Don’t make things up like that again! You know it’s not true.”

“No, Mum! The things are really there! I know you can’t see them, as you can’t see my unicorns, either. These are enchanted pictures! Just like mine!”

“Emily is right, Mrs Silverstone,” Jupiter said.

“I beg your pardon?” Mrs Silverstone wondered.

“These are paintings of a certain Martha Lake. We first heard about her yesterday, and we immediately noticed some amazing similarities between her and Emily.” Jupiter told Mrs Silverstone what their investigation had revealed so far. “Martha Lake’s paintings are indeed very similar to Emily’s, and this is no coincidence. It’s true what Emily says. They are enchanted, in a way.”

“Okay, Jupe,” Pete said. “It’s about time you enlightened us. I don’t understand a single word you’re saying. Enchanted? What are you talking about?”

The First Investigator took a deep breath. “I noticed that in this case, as confused as it was until now, some elements were always present... Seeing—the perception of things... The colour yellow. Emily was holding a bouquet of yellow flowers when the kea attacked her.”

“Nestor!” Emily burst out.

“All right, Nestor... Emily sees things that other people can’t. She paints pictures that, for everyone else, are just yellow patches, but she claims they are unicorns and gnomes—just like Martha Lake with her yellow paintings, and the rock arrangement in the forest with the big yellow rock in the middle... Alruna saw through the whole thing as well, only that she could not specifically say what it meant.”

“And what does it mean, Jupe?” Bob asked.

“It means that Emily is a tetrachromat.”

“A tetra-what?” Pete asked.

“A tetrachromat,” Jupe repeated.

Pete started to laugh. “You mean she’s from the planet Tetrachrome? She’s an alien? Have you blown a fuse for good, Jupe?”

“No aliens, Pete. Look, I’ll explain it to you,” Jupe said. “Any human can see colours. And all colours we perceive are basically composed of three primary colours—red, green and blue. For each of these primary colours, we have photoreceptor cells—also known as cone cells—on our retina. Our eyes receive red, green and blue in different intensities, and these are sent to the brain. The brain then uses this information to put together mixed colours, so we can also see yellow, pink, brown and all other colours that we know of. In principle, this works in the same way as with a television. It also composes a colour picture from tiny red, green and blue dots.

“What we have is something called trichromatic vision, hence we are trichromats. *Tri* comes from the Greek and it means three—three different types of cone cells on the retina. There are people who have only two different types of cone cells due to a genetic mutation.

They are dichromats. *Di* means two. They often cannot distinguish red from green, and this is commonly called red-green colour-blindness. Many animals are in a similar situation.

“And then there are animals that can see not only two or three, but four different primary colours.”

“Four,” Bob said. “So in Greek, it’s *tetra*—hence tetrachromats.”

“Exactly, Bob. Some insects are tetrachromats, as are many birds.” Jupiter turned and looked at Emily. “And on very, very rare cases, humans too, can be tetrachromats.”

Bob and Pete followed his gaze... and finally, Mrs Silverstone. All eyes were on Emily.

## 14. See with Different Eyes

“Why are you all looking at me like that?” Emily asked in a rattled manner. “Am I sick or something?”

Jupiter shook his head. “No, Emily, on the contrary. You have something ahead of us all. You are someone very, very special.”

“Wait a minute,” said Mrs Silverstone. “Are you saying that Emily has four types of these cone cells instead of three?”

“Yes,” Jupe said.

“Why?” Mrs Silverstone gasped. “I mean, where does she get it from? And what does it mean?”

“Above all, how do you know all this, Jupe?” Bob asked.

“I spent half the night in front of the computer checking on this subject,” Jupe explained. “Tetrachromats have an extra cone type as a result of a genetic mutation. This is like the mutation that occurs in colour blindness, except that all the tetrachromat’s cone types are completely functional. Also, people with tetrachromatic vision are always female. Women inherit two X chromosomes, and if a mutation occurs on both chromosomes, they have the potential of being a tetrachromat. This is also a reason why tetrachromatic vision is so rare in humans. Both parents must already have the predisposition for it in their genetic material for the child to be born as a tetrachromat.”

“But Emily’s father and I look perfectly normal,” Mrs Silverstone objected.

“Nevertheless, your genetic material may contain relevant information even if you do not know it yourself. But I will spare you the details of the theory of heredity. The important thing is that tetrachromats literally see the world with different eyes. Instead of perceiving their environment with three different colour cone cells, they have four—red, green, blue and something between red and green—in the range that trichromats normally see as yellow. You see, yellow is a mixed colour for us, but not for Emily! To her, yellow is much more than just yellow!”

“What does this mean, Jupiter?” asked Mrs Silverstone. “What does my daughter see when she sees something yellow?”

Jupiter sighed. “It’s hard to describe. In fact, it’s impossible. Imagine you wanted to explain the difference between red and green to a red-green colour-blind person, a dichromat. How do you do that? For such a person, red and green are one and the same colour! So it is the same situation between a tri- and a tetrachromat.”

Jupiter pointed to the paintings of Martha Lake. “You and I, Bob and Pete, we are all trichromats. We only see yellow. But for Emily, that is more than yellow. She sees... I don’t know what! I presume different colours! And because of that, she can see that this is not just yellow patches, but that Martha Lake has painted figures—a vase, a bowl of fruits, a woman, and a bridge.”

“And a house!” Emily added. “With a horse!”

“Yes, a house with a horse,” Jupiter said. “Mrs Silverstone, if your daughter is talking about magic flowers, it is because the flowers, which are only yellow to you and me, probably look brightly coloured to her. And if Emily paints a yellow picture and claims it to

be a unicorn, then there really is a unicorn—only it's not visible to any of us. I suppose Emily can create these pictures with two different yellow felt-tip pens. They are the same yellow only for you and me but for her, they're colourful."

Everyone had listened to Jupiter's lecture with wide eyes. Mrs Silverstone laughed—a laugh that was half nervous and half relieved. "Jupiter, I... I don't know what to say. If what you say is true, then so many things suddenly makes sense!"

She turned to her daughter, crouched down and put her arm around Emily's shoulder. "Emily, you really see a bridge there?" She pointed to the third painting.

Emily giggled. "No, Mum! That's the house with the horse!" She pointed to the fourth painting. "There's the bridge! Now do you believe me?"

"I... yes, I believe you, my dear," her mother said. "Even though I can hardly imagine it."

"Emily probably got used to the fact that she can see things that other people can't," explained Jupiter. "For her, it is normal. She intuitively knew that she was special. This strengthened the image she has of the world. She saw colourful magic flowers where others only saw normal yellow meadow flowers. So it was natural for her to take other things for reality as well, even though adults always told her that they did not exist—for example, elves, dwarfs, unicorns... and a kea can quickly become a dragon."

"This is fascinating," Pete remarked. "This is really fascinating! And you think Martha Lake was a tetrachromat too?"

"One hundred percent. Her pictures are the proof. Just like Emily, she came up with the idea that there are colour combinations that everyone else thinks are the same shade of colour, except her. She started painting pictures with these colours—pictures that only make sense to tetrachromats.

"And promptly, she was mistaken by her family for a nutcase—a mad woman who spends her time painting canvases all over in yellow. Nobody took her seriously, and Martha Lake finally felt so misunderstood as an artist that she decided not to leave a cent to her family, nor to her friends, nor to any club or other person, but only to someone who had the same unusual ability as her—another tetrachromat."

"You... you mean Emily?" Pete asked, looking back and forth from the little girl to the First Investigator and back again. "But Martha Lake didn't even know Emily!"

"I'm not talking about the fact that she had Emily specifically in mind. I guess she didn't care who would find her jewellery in the end... or when. She only wanted it to be a tetrachromat. That's why she hid her jewellery, and in a way that only a tetrachromat could see. No trichromat in the world should have a chance of finding it."

"That's why Emily was kidnapped," cried Mrs Silverstone, immediately putting her arms around her daughter. "Because she is the only one who can find the jewels!"

Jupiter nodded. "That is the logical conclusion."

"But wait a minute," Bob interrupted. "How could the kidnapper know that Emily was a tetrachromat? She didn't even know it herself!"

"There can be only one explanation for this. The kidnapper had enough information to figure it out himself, as I did. And, strictly speaking, there's only one person who could have done it." Jupiter cast an inviting look around.

"Dr Wakefield!" cried Pete. "Why, of course! He was Martha's eye doctor! And Emily's! He must have done tests and found out that both were tetrachromats!"

"But why didn't he tell me this when I sent Emily to him?" Mrs Silverstone wondered.

"So that no one gets in his way. He knew about Martha Lake's tetrachromatic vision. Presumably she had confided in him and told him about her jewellery and that she would hide

it so that only a tetrachromat would be able to find it. Then Martha Lake died and Dr Wakefield went on searching for a tetrachromat for his purpose—to find the jewellery. It took a year, but finally Emily came to him and he realized that she was the one he was looking for.”

“But,” Bob said, “Dr Wakefield didn’t take Emily. If he had, she would have recognized him immediately. Right, Emily?”

The girl shook her head. “It wasn’t him.”

“Then he had an accomplice,” Jupiter said. “But Wakefield was behind it, I’m pretty sure. And he also had a clear idea of where Martha Lake’s jewellery might be hidden—somewhere near the Dragon’s Eye. So the kidnapper asked Emily what she saw. I suppose it was too risky for him to force her to answer in broad daylight after all, but I’m sure he intended to return with her under the cover of darkness that evening. But by that time, the kea —”

“Nestor!” Emily burst out.

“Sorry... Nestor has already freed her.”

“Man, Jupe!” Pete marvelled. “It all makes sense! But there are still a few things missing. How does the kea—”

“Nestor!” cried Emily furiously.

“Sorry... how does Nestor fit into the story?” Pete continued. “And the birdman? And who shot Nestor?”

“I confess that I have not been able to figure out all the details. But I’m sure that will change once we find Martha Lake’s jewellery...” Jupe said and turned to Emily. “With your help, Emily!”

Emily started jumping excitedly. “Now let’s go find the treasure!”

“Not so fast, young lady. First, we must get home,” Mrs Silverstone reminded her. “Inspector Kershaw will be there any moment to question us. What shall we tell him, Jupiter?”

The First Investigator thoughtfully pinched his lower lip. “Only the necessities. Kershaw won’t understand the rest of it anyway. Tell him that you suspect Dr Wakefield of being connected to the kidnapper. The police will probably pick him up and interrogate him immediately. That way, he won’t get in the way. As soon as you are available, return here with Emily, and then we’ll go find Martha Lake’s jewellery together!”

## 15. I Can See Things That You Can't

The Three Investigators reckoned that Emily and her mother would return soon, but they never came. The morning crawled along slowly. On Sundays, The Jones Salvage Yard was closed, not a single customer entered the premises, and the minute hand of a large clock, which was on one of the sales tables, seemed to be stuck.

As the sun rose, so did the temperature. Finally, The Three Investigators sought refuge from the midday heat at the verandah of the yard office. They stared across the salvage yard area shimmering in the hot air to the gate and waited. There was still no sign of the Silverstones.

"What's taking them so long?" moaned Pete repeatedly. "I don't understand it."

"Who knows what Kershaw will do to them," Jupiter remarked.

Then they were silent again. And they waited. Aunt Mathilda came around to the verandah, blinked at the sun and gasped softly. "Today must be the hottest day of the year! And you're sitting here. How can I understand you three? Don't you want to go to the beach? When I was your age..."

"Aunt Mathilda, please!" complained Jupiter. "When you were our age, there were no ozone warnings, skin cancer or smog... Besides, we are waiting for someone."

"All right. Whatever you say." She disappeared back into the office.

Little by little the shadows grew longer. In the afternoon, the sun shone on the verandah and The Three Investigators moved their base to the shadows of Headquarters.

It was three o'clock when Pete finally said: "Something is wrong! I sensed that something has gone wrong. Mrs Silverstone should have contacted us by now! Why—"

Suddenly, the telephone at Headquarters rang. Jupiter jumped up, ran into the trailer and picked up the phone. "The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Jupiter? This is Mrs Silverstone. I'm sorry it's taking so long. We're now at the police department. It's a disaster! We're being questioned dozens of times, and had to go through all sorts of procedures. I... I just can't put all of this into words as well as you, Jupiter. I have the feeling that the police don't believe me—at least not all of it."

"Have the police contacted Dr Wakefield yet?"

"Yes. They brought him here to the station. I only saw him for a moment before he was led into another room," Mrs Silverstone said. "I don't know what's going on in there. I don't know what's gonna happen now either. All I know is... Emily is hungry and tired... and she's bored."

She lowered her voice as she continued angrily: "And that Inspector Kershaw is very imposing! I have never seen such a rude person! Besides, it is so warm in here! And Nestor is driving everyone crazy. Emily insisted that he come with us. But when he went to the inspector's desk... well, when he was doing his business, Kershaw didn't think it was funny, and now he's even more unfriendly than before."

"Emily had cried a few times. She wants to go home. She'd rather go to your place and help you find the treasure. But I have to stay at the station and... uh... can you do me a favour?"

"Of course, Mrs Silverstone."



“Could you look after Emily while I’m still here?” Mrs Silverstone asked. “It will probably take a few more hours, but I’m sure it will go faster if Emily and her adventurous stories don’t keep interfering... And especially when Nestor finally stops shredding all the files.”

From the background, Jupe could hear the parrot screeching.

Somebody yelled, “Get out of here, you pest!”

Then came Emily’s voice: “That’s no pest, that’s Nestor!”

Jupiter could not resist a giggle. “I hear it, Mrs Silverstone. Emily can come to us, of course, while you’re busy with them.”

“Thank you, Jupiter! Thank you very much.”

Ten minutes later, a taxi stopped in front of the salvage yard. Emily got out, and Nestor was on her shoulder.

“Don’t you dare get into my taxi with your bird again,” growled the driver, and then he accelerated and roared away.

The Three Investigators rushed to the gate, unlocked it and let Emily in.

“Hello, Emily,” Pete said, grinning. “What did Nestor do to annoy the taxi driver?”

“That nasty man! Nestor was just nibbling on the seat. Well, he liked it. Birds have to eat something, don’t they? The taxi driver didn’t like that. And the cops were mean to Nestor too. I’ll never go there again. Can I have something to drink?”

“Sure,” Jupiter said and they returned to Headquarters. Nestor flapped up and landed on the roof of the trailer.

“Then shall we go and find the treasure?” Emily asked.

“I’d say we’d better wait for your mother,” Jupiter suggested and handed Emily a glass of orange juice.

The disappointment was clearly written on Emily’s face and she did not try to hide it.

“But you promised! You promised that we would look for the treasure today!”

“Yes, but I’m sure your mother wouldn’t want you to go into the forest alone,” Pete tried.

“I’m not alone. You’re coming with me,” Emily argued. “And of course with Nestor!”

“Kraaah!” Nestor croaked as if to confirm. The bird tampered with the stove pipe that protruded from the roof of Headquarters and stuck his head inside. “Kraaah!” he squawked.

“And besides, I’m sure Mum won’t be back until tonight. The cops are stupid. They always ask the same questions. I bet it goes on forever,” Emily said. “Please! Let’s find the treasure! Please, please, please! I’ve been looking for it for so long!”

Jupiter frowned. “Excuse me? What do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve been looking all summer! Ever since I went to Dr Wakefield and he told me about the enchanted treasure. Actually, that was a secret, but now Dr Wakefield is one of the bad guys, right?”

Suddenly Pete hit his forehead. “The enchanted treasure! Of course! You told me about it, Emily—when we were in your room, remember?”

“Sure. But you promised not to tell!” Emily remarked.

“I did not,” Pete confessed. “To be honest, I actually forgot all about it!”

The First Investigator shook his head reluctantly. “Wait a minute! Let’s start over again! Emily, you’ve got to tell us everything about this treasure! When did Dr Wakefield tell you about that? What exactly did he say to you?”

Emily was visibly proud that she suddenly had the undivided attention of The Three Investigators. “When I was with Dr Wakefield, he would always give me those picture tests.

There were those colourful wavy lines on them that I had to trace them out. Then there were cards of different colours and I had to match them, which I thought was pretty stupid.

“Anyway, one day Dr Wakefield asked me if I could see things other people couldn’t. And then I told him about the magic flowers and stuff. Then he got all excited and started talking about a treasure. He said there was an enchanted treasure hidden in the forest. It was invisible, but I might be able to find it. But he told me not to tell anyone about it. Then I promised him that I’d find the treasure for him. He was so happy.

“I asked him where the treasure was because the forest is so big, but he didn’t know exactly. He just said I should look for something that looked like the magic flowers. Well, that’s what I did. I spent so much time in the forest but I haven’t found anything that looks like the magic flowers.”

For a moment, there was an incredulous silence. “But, Emily, why didn’t you tell this to us this morning?” Bob asked.

“Why? You already knew about the treasure!”

Jupiter laughed. “That’s what I call childlike logic.” Then a confident smile spread across his face. “Emily,” he said solemnly, “we are going to find the treasure now!”

“There’s another one!” Emily cried as she let go of Pete’s hand and plunged into a small wild meadow strewn with colourful flowers. But instead of picking the bright blue or lush red flowers, Emily chose an inconspicuous yellow one. She already had five yellow flowers together. Proudly, she returned and handed the small bouquet to The Three Investigators. “Wonderful, isn’t it?”

“Great, Emily,” Pete said. “But tell me, could you describe these flowers?” All day long he had been trying to imagine how a tetrachromat might look at the world, especially what it was like to see more colours than anyone else. He couldn’t.

“Describe?” asked Emily, irritated. “Well, there’s a stem with leaves on it. And on top of it is a flower with petals. Can’t you see that?”

“Yes, I mean the colours!”

“These are magic colours!” Emily cried and beamed.

“You mean the flowers aren’t yellow?”

“Yes, there’s a bit of yellow too.”

“And what else?”

“Well, red and green...”

“Green? Green petals? I’ve never heard of that before!”

Emily rolled her eyes. “That’s why they’re magic flowers, Pete! Here!” She pressed the bouquet into his hand. “It’s a gift.” Then she happily hopped along the forest path.

The Second Investigator stared at the flowers and shook his head. “Fascinating. Red... and green... I only see yellow.”

“You’re just an ordinary trichromat, Pete,” Jupiter said.

Bob laughed. “Imagine Emily playing I-can-see-things-that-you-can’t with us. We wouldn’t stand a chance!”

Nestor was no longer sitting on Emily’s shoulder. He flew from tree to tree, waiting for his new friend to follow. It was just like Pete’s first encounter with the kea two days ago. But suddenly Nestor took off and did not land in the next tree, but flew further and further.

“Nestor!” cried Emily fearfully. “Don’t fly away! Come back, Nestor!” She ran after the bird.

“Emily!” cried Bob. “Don’t go so far away!”

But she didn't pay attention to The Three Investigators at all. She just kept running.

"Children!" Jupiter groaned. "Hopefully I'll never have any!"

They hurried to follow Emily. Fifty metres ahead, they had caught up with her. Emily stood under a thick oak tree and looked sadly into the tree tops, which glowed in the sun in a rich golden green. There was no sign of Nestor.

"He's gone," she sobbed. "He just flew away! ... Nestor! Neeestoor!" Already tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, Emily, I'm sure Nestor was just flying around a little," Pete tried to comfort her. "I'm sure he'll be back any minute!"

"Do you really think so?" Emily sobbed and looked at him hopefully.

"Sure," Pete claimed, though he wasn't sure at all.

"But what if he can't find me?"

"Then—"

"Keeeah!" Nestor's scream was loud and clear. The bird had to be close by.

"Nestor!" Emily cried and ran off again.

The boys chased after her and they all reached a clearing at the same time. It was the clearing at the edge of the forest road where Martha Lake's colourfully painted rocks stood.

And in the middle of the Dragon's Eye, right on the bright yellow rock, sat a man with dark hair. With one hand, he stroked Nestor, who perched on his shoulder and nibbled on his ear.

In the other hand, he held a gun pointed at Emily and The Three Investigators.

## 16. Follow the Gaze

At the sight of the man, Emily screamed and hid herself fearfully behind Pete. “That’s him! This is the man who took me!”

“Good afternoon, Emily,” the man said in a velvety voice and climbed down from the rock. His body was wiry, his voice cutting and firm. “I’m glad we meet again so soon. And it’s very fortunate that you brought my bird.”

The Three Investigators quickly ran through their options, but escape was as out of the question as attack. The man had a gun, and he was ruthless enough to kidnap a little girl. No one knew what else he was capable of.

“So these three lads are probably The Three Investigators who have caused me many a headache,” the stranger continued.

Jupiter was the first to overcome his surprise and understood who stood before him. “You’re the man who was at Michael Lake’s house yesterday and overheard us talking to him at the door, I assume. Are you his brother?”

“His cousin,” he corrected. “But all due respect, you know a lot.”

Jupiter reached into his pants pocket.

Alarmed, Mr Lake raised his gun. “No tricks!”

But Jupiter only pulled out the silver lighter they had found the day before. He threw it to the man. “Here you are! I think you dropped this! Because of the initials ‘M.L.’, we first suspected that Michael Lake was behind the kidnapping.”

The man laughed mockingly. “And you didn’t come up with the idea that my initials could also be M.L.—Marcus Lake... By the way, how did you know I am here?”

The First Investigator’s gaze darkened even more. “It was pure coincidence. I hate to admit it, but I had no idea we’d run into you here. What brings you here?”

He got closer to The Three Investigators. Emily began to whimper and clung to Pete’s leg.

Lake’s voice became hard. “I ask the questions! What are you doing here?”

“The same as you, I suppose,” replied Jupiter.

“Martha Lake’s jewellery?” Lake narrowed his eyes. “You know where it’s hidden?”

“Not yet. We were here to find it.”

“And she is the key, isn’t she?” Lake pointed at Emily.

“So it would seem,” Jupe said.

“Wait a minute!” Pete interfered. “I’m not understanding this. How do you know so much? I thought Dr Wakefield was behind all this!”

Lake set about replying, but Jupiter beat him to it: “That was my mistake, Pete. I overestimated the role of Dr Wakefield and didn’t consider that the Lakes themselves could be involved in Emily’s kidnap.”

He turned to Mr Lake. “Both Dr Wakefield and you were looking for Martha Lake’s jewellery. Dr Wakefield knew your aunt was a tetrachromat and what he was looking for. And you knew it too, didn’t you?”

“You are surprisingly well-informed. Yes, I knew because I found medical records after her death. I talked to Wakefield and played dumb, but he didn’t tell me about my aunt’s

special talent. From that moment on, it was clear to me that Wakefield had his own agenda and wanted to find the jewels himself.”

“That means you knew you had to find a tetrachromat to get Martha Lake’s jewellery. But what made you think Emily was one?”

Mr Lake laughed. “Well, through you!”

“Through us?” Bob asked.

Mr Lake looked at Bob. “To be more precise, through you. When the kea was shot over the corn field, I was initially convinced that you were the shooter. That’s why I knocked you down.”

“So you are the one who knocked me out!” Bob exclaimed.

“Yes, but then I found the notebook that dropped out of your pocket when you fell. That book had everything I needed to know about Emily and Dr Wakefield. I finally realized that I had found in Emily the tetrachromat I had been searching for a year.”

“Goodness!” cried Bob. “The notebook! I hadn’t thought of that at all!”

“So you decided to kidnap Emily, but she managed to escape before she gave you the answers you needed,” Jupiter said. “There’s something else that’s been bothering me so far. What is it about the kea? You trained him, didn’t you? To look for things that are yellow?”

“Things that are yellow?” Pete asked with a frown. “What makes you think that, Jupe?”

“Very simple, Pete! Nestor attacked Emily when she was holding a yellow flower bouquet. This morning, when we looked at Martha Lake’s paintings, he flew purposefully towards it. And did you notice that at Mrs Silverstone’s house, the book he half-pecked had a bright yellow cover? I suppose the attack on Emily wasn’t really an attack. Nestor was just trained to fly to anything yellow...”

“Good observations,” Marcus Lake said gloatingly. “I knew that Aunt Martha had hidden her jewellery in the forest. She said it to my face then... and laughed because she was sure I would never find it.

“She said I had to be able to fly to find it. When I learned after her death that she was a tetrachromat, I realized that she had hidden her jewellery in a way that only another tetrachromat could find it. As you know, the colour yellow plays an important role in tetrachromats. And I remembered what she had said about flying.

“So I got the most intelligent bird I could find and trained him to fly to anything that was yellow. It took me months to train the kea... I taught him to nod his head to let me know if he had found something. I wanted him to scour the woods to find something in the trees... or on a high rock—just in a place that is difficult for people to access. But what did he do? He flew to these painted rocks again and again and again! I had come across the Dragon’s Eye before! My aunt painted these stones. The biggest of them is yellow! So it was safe to assume that the hiding place is somewhere around here. But I searched the whole area, I dug out every single rock and rolled them away—nothing! Nothing is hidden here!”

“So the kea’s training hasn’t done you any good,” Jupiter concluded. He couldn’t help but grin maliciously. “... Except that we’ve got you figured out.”

“Nothing better could have happened to me,” Lake said triumphantly. “You brought me Emily and the kea! But now the talk is over! I want to find Aunt Martha’s jewellery, and I want it now! Come here, Emily!”

Emily flinched and clung more firmly to Pete’s leg.

“Leave her alone,” Pete hissed.

“Absolutely nothing will happen to her,” Marcus Lake assured. Then he lowered his voice threateningly. “She only need to tell me what she sees!”

Emily pressed her lips together and shook her head.

“Tell me!” cried Lake.

“Your aunt did not want you to find her jewellery,” Emily replied defiantly. “I will tell you nothing. You can’t make me tell you anything.”

“Oh, yes, I can.”

“If you harm one hair on her head, you’ll regret it,” cried Pete.

“Really?” Lake’s voice went soft again as he pointed his gun at the Second Investigator. “Well, I have no intention of harming a hair on her head. I have a much better idea.”

He smiled, turned the gun and pointed it at the bird on his shoulder.

“Leave Nestor alone!” Emily cried and crept out behind Pete.

“I will... if you answer my question.” Marcus Lake promised.

“No,” Emily said firmly.

Lake made the safety catch on the gun snap back.

“Nestor!” cried Emily. “Come to me! Come here, Nestor!”

But the bird remained unmoved on Lake’s shoulder and nibbled at the barrel of the gun.

“So, Emily? Would you like to watch your beloved Nestor being blown apart—or will you answer my question?”

Emily started crying. Seeking help, she turned to The Three Investigators.

Jupiter bent down to her. “Tell him, Emily. Then he wouldn’t hurt Nestor.”

After a while, she nodded silently. Then she took a step towards the circular rock arrangement and looked at the rock in the middle.

“Well, Emily, I see a big yellow rock,” Marcus Lake said and was quite friendly again. “What do you see?”

“It is a rock,” Emily replied sobbing. “But it is not yellow. It’s all colourful. It has an eye painted on it—a dragon’s eye... and then there are letters that go all the way round.”

The Three Investigators were once again fascinated. Emily saw things in that yellow-painted rock that they could never have dreamed of. And Marcus Lake also seemed more than surprised. “What letters? What does it say?”

“I don’t know. I can’t read yet,” Emily said.

The Three Investigators looked at each other helplessly. Then Jupiter had an idea. He pulled a notebook from his pocket. “Emily, can you draw the letters for us?”

She nodded, took the pad and slowly scribbled letter by letter on the paper while circling the yellow rock once. Then she wanted to show Jupiter the note, but Marcus Lake snatched it from her.

“‘Follow the gaze to where the treasure lays’,” he read.

“Follow the gaze! The gaze of the dragon!” cried Bob. “Wherever the dragon’s eye looks, Martha Lake’s jewellery is hidden there!”

“Emily!” Mr Lake said. “Where is the eye looking at?”

She hesitated a while and then said: “Up.”

“Where to, exactly?” Lake probed further.

Emily put her head back and searched the trees and the sky. She looked again at the dragon’s eye, looked up and tried to follow the gaze.

“There!” she finally cried, pointing into the trees. In the dense branches of an oak tree, several metres above their heads, was a bird’s nest.

“A nest,” Marcus Lake said tonelessly. “Are you really sure, Emily?”

She nodded while still pointing into the trees. “The dragon’s eye is looking right there.”

Lake was silent for a moment. His face turned to stone. Then it turned into an angry, distorted grimace. “A bird’s nest right above me! And I’ve searched every point on the ground and turned over every rock.”

He turned his head and gave Nestor a hateful look. He pushed the bird off his shoulder and shouted: "You rascal! You sat on that tree! You nibbled at everything else! I trained you! Why didn't you bring me the jewels?"

He pointed his gun at the kea. Nestor shrieked and fluttered, then landed on Emily's shoulder. Emily screamed and ducked.

"Put the gun down, Lake!" Jupiter yelled.

For a terrible moment, it looked like Lake would actually pull the trigger. Then he relaxed, but he didn't lower the gun. Instead he pointed it at Pete. "You! You look sporty enough. Climb up that tree and get me that nest!"

Pete winced. "Me? Why me?"

"Because I said so! I'm tired of arguing with you guys. Climb that tree!" Marcus Lake had become so aggressive that Pete did not dare to hesitate any longer.

He stepped up to the thick tree trunk, looked up. Then he jumped up, got hold of the lowest branch and pulled himself up with difficulty. From then on it was easier. Skilfully, he climbed further and further, as if on a ladder, until he finally sat astride a branch at a dizzying height and saw the bird's nest—a metre away in the thin branches at the edge of the treetop. "I'll never get at it," he shouted. "The branch will break!"

"Do it!" yelled Lake.

"But..."

"Now!"

The Second Investigator saw that Lake had pointed the gun at him again. He had no choice. He lay flat on the branch and crawled forward slowly. The branch leaned menacingly under his weight, and the nest was still too far away to reach. Pete broke out in a sweat. Bit by bit, he pushed himself forward. Then... crack!

"Oh gosh! Oh gosh! What was that?" Pete did not dare to move. "Is the branch breaking?"

"I can't see!" cried Bob. "Come back, Pete, it's too dangerous!"

"Absolutely not! Get me that nest!" Marcus Lake shouted.

Pete crawled a few centimetres further, but there was another crack. No. There's no way he would climb any further! The Second Investigator had an idea. He broke off a branch, freed it from the disturbing leaves and fished for the bird's nest. The nest was wobbling.

"Look out," cried Pete. "It's coming down!"

He gave the nest a final push. It tilted, fell down and landed upside down between Jupiter, Bob, Emily and Mr Lake. Nestor flapped up, landed on the ground and tampered with the bird's nest. He turned it over.

The nest was empty!

## 17. Emily's Lie

"That," Lake stammered. "That... that's not possible! Where are the damn jewels? Where—"

Jupiter grinned viciously. "If the jewellery was hidden in a bird's nest, it is certain to be plundered over time by thieving magpies or other birds. Well, Mr Lake, I guess you can keep on looking for your aunt's jewellery—all over the forest, if not all of California. Only now, we can't help you anymore."

"It can't be!" yelled Lake. "It's impossible!"

Suddenly a voice penetrated the forest. "Emily! Emily, are you here?"

"Mum!" cried Emily fearfully. "Mummy, stay away, the kidnapper is here!"

For a moment, everything remained silent, except for Pete making his way down from the tree. Then they all heard heavy footsteps breaking through the undergrowth.

Marcus Lake turned pale as two uniformed men with guns jumped into the clearing. "Freeze! Drop your weapon!"

"Inspector Kershaw!" cried Jupiter. Lake was frozen stiff.

"Put the gun down!" Kershaw yelled to Marcus Lake.

Lake lowered his gun. For a moment, it looked like he would drop it and surrender. Instead, he raised the gun and pointed it at Emily. A sneaky smile crept up on his face. "If you pull that trigger, Inspector, a bullet might come out of my gun and hit poor Emily."

Nobody moved. No one dared to breathe. Even Emily just stared at Lake.

Just as Pete reached the ground, Mrs Silverstone stepped into the clearing. "Emily!"

"Mummy!"

"Freeze!" hissed Marcus Lake. "All of you! Nobody move! And you, Emily, come to me very slowly."

The girl didn't budge.

"I said, come here, Emily!" Lake yelled at her.

Emily started crying. Jupiter looked at Pete and Bob. They nodded at him. Without haste, all three of them stepped up and stood protectively in front of Emily.

"What..." Lake began, shaking with rage. "Get away!"

Jupiter shook his head calmly. "No. Your game is over, Mr Lake. Don't make it worse. Kidnapping is a serious offence, but if you're reasonable now, you can get away with a few years in prison."

"You miserable, fat smart ass!" Lake took a step forward. He raised his weapon. And pointed it at Jupiter.

Bang! The shot was deafening.

Bob and Pete ducked. Mrs Silverstone screamed. Nestor flapped up. And Marcus Lake dropped his gun, pressed his left hand to his shoulder and collapsed. In a matter of seconds, the two policemen rushed up and overpowered him. Mrs Silverstone rushed to Emily and held her close.

And Jupiter let himself sink into the soft grass in relief. "My goodness! For a moment, I thought he was shooting at me. Inspector Kershaw, I'm not sure if this was standard police procedure, but it seemed a little dangerous to shoot at Lake while he had a gun pointed at me."



“Save your comments and don’t tell me how to do my job!” Kershaw snarled angrily.

“Now, look here,” cried Mrs Silverstone in indignation. “These three saved my daughter’s life!”

“Nonsense! I saved your daughter’s life, in case you haven’t noticed. And now to you, you would-be detectives... I have expressly forbidden you to continue to work on this case! There will be consequences! Unfortunately, I am returning to my own precinct tomorrow. Cotta’s leave is over.”

“Thank goodness,” Pete gasped. At that moment, he raised his hand to his mouth and looked at Kershaw in horror. If Kershaw’s gaze could have killed, the Second Investigator would have turned to dust.

“How about you call an ambulance,” Lake screamed in rage. Still pressing his free hand against his injured, bleeding shoulder.

Inspector Kershaw signalled to his men to proceed. Then he turned to The Three Investigators, laboriously restrained. “Now, you three... explain what happened here!”

Jupiter Jones cleared his throat and summarized the events of the last days and especially the last hour in short words. Kershaw had tried to interrupt him several times, but Jupiter simply wouldn’t let him speak. In the end, no more questions remained unanswered—except for one.

“Where are the jewels?” Bob wanted to know. “Do you really think the magpies stole them, Jupe?”

The First Investigator shrugged. “It is possible. On the other hand, I can’t get one question out of my mind. How would an old woman like Martha Lake put her jewellery in a bird’s nest which our sporty Second Investigator had problems reaching?”

“You got that right, Jupe,” Bob said, pondering.

Suddenly, Emily started giggling. She had apparently forgotten the horror of the last few minutes.

“What is it, my dear?” her mother asked.

“I know where the treasure is!” Emily blurted out.

“You... you know?” Bob asked.

“Sure! I’m not blind like you all!”

“What do you mean?” Bob probed further.

She pointed at Marcus Lake. “When that man asked me where the dragon’s eye was looking at, I lied, of course.”

For a moment, there was dead silence.

“Now, we’re on to something!” Jupiter’s voice almost rolled over.

Emily bounced with enthusiasm. “I simply looked for some place where the treasure could be... and then I saw the bird’s nest. You all totally believed it!”

“Emily! You... you’re amazing!” Pete exclaimed.

“You little beast!” Marcus Lake hissed and stepped forward, but a policeman held him back. Bob and Jupiter couldn’t believe it either.

“Then where is the treasure hidden?” Bob asked. “Where is the dragon’s eye looking at?”

“Well, there,” Emily said, pointing to another tree that was a little further away. At a height of about three metres, an old birdhouse was attached. It had seemed to have been hanging there for decades and was already so weathered that it was almost invisible in front of the tree’s gnarled trunk. The Three Investigators ran towards it.

“Perhaps I was wrong about Martha Lake putting her jewellery up that high,” Jupiter quipped.

“Up you go again, Pete!” Bob cried and folded his hands into a robber ladder.

The Second Investigator didn't have to think twice. In no time at all, he was up to the birdhouse and took it down.

"Look! The little round entrance has been nailed shut with a piece of wood!" He shook the house. It jingled. "There's something in there!"

"Open it!" Emily cried excitedly. "Come on, open it!"

"I'd love nothing more," Pete replied, squatted down beside her and reached for the roof of the birdhouse. The wood was so rotten that it immediately gave way. He tore the roof out.

"Hold out your hands, Emily!" Pete said.

She put her hands together and stared at it. Then Pete poured the contents of the birdhouse into it. Gold chains, gem-set rings and pearl earrings poured into Emily's hands. She squealed with delight. "The treasure! We found the treasure!"

"You found the treasure!" corrected Jupiter. "Without you, we would never have found the hiding place."

Emily stepped back into the clearing and held the gold, silver and gems in the sunlight where they glittered and shone. The jewels shimmered in every conceivable colour.

And for Emily Silverstone, there were also colours that no one there could imagine.

## 18. All's Well That Ends Well

It was a warm, sunny day. The Three Investigators, Emily, Mrs Silverstone and Alruna were sitting in the grass outside Alruna's wooden cabin.

The most fantastic delicacies were spread out on a chequered blanket and everyone helped themselves. Emily had wanted this picnic. Finally, Alruna and Mrs Silverstone had got to know each other. Against all expectations, they got along very well.

While Nestor walked happily among salads, cakes and breads and nibbled at everything that got in his way, The Three Investigators told the details of this exciting case again and again.

"It remains to be seen what happens to Dr Wakefield," Jupiter said. "He only tried to get Martha Lake's jewellery with Emily's help."

"Well," Pete replied, smacking his lips. "But he did shoot at Nestor, and threatened you with a gun."

"As the kea is an endangered species, the police will be referring this matter to the Department of Fish and Wildlife," Bob said. "I'm sure Dr Wakefield is not going to get off lightly for this offence."

"Why did he shoot at the bird?" asked Alruna.

"He was afraid that the Lakes might beat him to it, so he watched them constantly," Jupiter explained. "That's how he knew that Marcus Lake had travelled to Rocky Beach with a kea. When we went to Wakefield with Emily and told him about the attack, he immediately drew the right conclusions. He knew what Marcus Lake was trying to do, and he knew that Nestor could become a danger. There was a chance that the Lakes might find the treasure before him. So Wakefield immediately lay in wait at the edge of the corn field, shot Nestor and made off in his BMW out of the dust. Fortunately, it was only a graze."

"I guess he wasn't as nice as I always thought he was," said Emily, reaching for a piece of cake and feeding it to Nestor.

"Dr Wakefield also realized that we might be dangerous to him when he saw us in the rear-view mirror during the chase," Jupiter continued. "When we visited Michael Lake, he was shadowing the house. It looked to him like we were working with the Lakes. So he waited outside the salvage yard at night and he pulled a gun on me."

"Michael Lake's threat to Dr Wakefield, on the other hand, was an oversight," Bob continued. "Wakefield and the Lakes had been in each other's way before over Martha's jewellery. Then Marcus found out about Dr Wakefield's relationship with Emily from my notebook. He was obviously annoyed and mentioned to his cousin that Wakefield was still pursuing the jewellery. So Michael got all annoyed and went to see Dr Wakefield. Marcus was not at all enthusiastic about this, however, because he feared that he would be found out in the search for Emily."

Alruna shook her head. "Confusing, really confusing."

"But now I have one more question for you, Alruna," Jupiter said. "How did you know that Marcus Lake, the birdman, was up to no good? You were up to something, weren't you? All that talk about second sight, aura and stuff like that... that was just for show, wasn't it?"

Alruna looked at him with wide eyes, but finally she shook her head, smiling. “Jupiter Jones... You still only believe what you see, don’t you? It is admirable that you base your understanding on scientific knowledge.

“But look at it this way... Scientific knowledge is derived from phenomena in a three-dimensional world as perceived by the five basic senses of humans. Scientific conclusions are also based on assumptions. These are some of the limitations. Despite that, anything that cannot be verified by today’s science is usually dismissed and ridiculed—but that does not mean that it does not exist.

“Just with the sense of sight alone, Martha and Emily have shown that they could see things that many people can’t. Then there are people who have extrasensory perception—the ability to perceive by means other than the five senses.

“So you place your trust in scientific knowledge even though you may not have verified it personally. However, I place trust in myself. There are certain things that I and many other people can sense that cannot be explained to those who can’t.” She looked around smiling. “More tea, anyone?”

The Three Investigators were baffled. Pete tried to suppress a grin, Bob was silent, and Jupiter, well, Jupiter... nobody knew what he was thinking.

Alruna continued: “But I can assure you of one thing. Martha Lake was a good friend of mine and she would certainly be happy with the outcome of this story. Emily is so like her—it’s absolutely right that she should get the inheritance.”

Pete turned to Emily. “Do you already know what you’re going to do with all this jewellery?”

Emily frowned. “I think I’ll keep the most beautiful ones... And the ugly ones will be sold... And with the money, Nestor gets a climbing tree and lots of toys and special bird food and stuff.”

Mrs Silverstone rolled her eyes. “As happy as I am that this story ended so well, that bird will drive me crazy!”

Suddenly Nestor fluttered up and sat on Mrs Silverstone’s lap. He looked at her and nodded his head violently. The Three Investigators, Emily and Alruna laughed.

“There is no doubt, Mrs Silverstone,” Jupiter said. “Nestor agrees with you!”

“Keeaaaaaah!”